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THAT FLOATING FIGURE WAS AGAIN OVER THE CENTRE OF THE CAMP.

Dandy Dick's Decoy;

OR,

THE ROUSING TIME AT ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE.

BY ROBERT RANDOLPH INMAN,
AUTHOR OF "DANDY DICK, DETECTIVE,"
"DANDY DICK'S DOUBLE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MONSTROUS DEED.

"GOOD heavens! Craig Morgan, you would not hang me!"

"Yes, Jezebel; and not only would, but will. Owen, make ready that lariat."

A scene on the loneliest of mountain trails. Two men and a woman the actors.

The woman is upon her knees before one of the men, her hands clasped and held toward him imploringly, her face a picture of commingled fear and horror.

The man is looking upon her with the utmost contempt. His hard, cruel face, wears a half-smile, his lips curl with scorn, and a hand rests upon a revolver. He appears inclined to shoot her.

With a lariat in hand, the third personage stands awaiting his master's directions. His face, too, is cruel and villainous. It is an early morning hour, the evidences of a night's bivouac are seen around, and there are indications that the trio have taken a hasty departure from somewhere.

The man Owen turns and casts the end of the lariat over the convenient limb of a stunted pine near at hand, while Craig Morgan draws the weapon upon which his hand has rested, threatening to kill the woman who now clings to him with arms around his knees.

"Curse you, let go of me!" he hisses. "If you don't, I will drive a bullet through your head and so save the trouble of hanging you."

"Shoot me, then, shoot me if you will," the woman sobs, while tears stream down her cheeks, "but do not, oh! heavens! do not hang me! What have I done that has made you hate me so?"

"Well enough do you know what you have done, Pearl Mayne," is the stern response.

"I know that two or three times I have saved your life at the risk of my own, Craig Morgan!" is the pitiful rejoinder.

"Bah! what of that? Perhaps I should have escaped in some other way, even if you hadn't interfered. You have done a thing that overbalances all that, and I say again that you shall swing!"

"But, what is it I have done? Surely you will not take my life without telling me the reason. I fell asleep last night at your side; a moment ago you awoke me with curses, dragged me here, and— Oh! you do not mean it, you can not mean it, Craig!"

"You shall soon see whether I mean it or not, you Jezebel! No, I will not take your life without first telling you why I do it; there would be poor satisfaction in that. It is because it was you who freed Dick Darrel, when I had him in my power, and you who murdered my companion, Adele Woolfe."

The woman releases her hold and falls back, a new horror depicted upon her face.

"How—how could you know that!" she gasps.

"How, indeed, except by your talking in your sleep a few minutes ago!"

"Heavens! then I have told you everything. But, you do not know how I loved you—you can never understand how I loved you!"

"Bah! if you call that love, I want none of it. You are crazy, and the sooner you are out of the way the better. You do not deny the charges I make, so I want no further proof."

"I can offer no denial, if you overheard me talking about it in my sleep. I can only beg for mercy. Dick Darrel had befriended me, and I could not see him die and not try to save him. And that woman—I hated her because she usurped the place that was rightfully mine!"

"Ha, ha, ha! So, that was the way you took to show your love for me, eh? To free my worst enemy, and to kill the most faithful woman pard I ever had. Your burning eyes, your intense look, all go to prove that you are out of your mind, and you will be a good deal safer dead than alive. No use to whine for mercy, for you will not get any mercy at my hands."

The woman's eyes blaze with fury, and her hand seeks a knife.

"You do not understand me, Craig Morgan," she mutters; "you are incapable of under-

standing me. I will be more to you than Adele Woolfe ever could be, if you will only let me."

"Bah! she was worth a dozen of you. There was no nonsense about her. She proved her regard for me by her deeds. She was brave, daring, just such a companion as I needed, and, in a way, I loved her. You killed her, and you shall—"

"And I will kill you!" the woman cries, springing up, knife in hand. "If I cannot have your love, you shall never give it to another!"

She springs at him, but the other man, having prepared the lariat, has come up behind her, and now seizes her arms.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Craig Morgan laughs again. "You see it is of little use, my fair lunatic."

She is speedily disarmed, and together the men drag her to the tree.

Loudly she shrieks for help, but the rugged hills only send back the echo of her voice.

Her hands are hastily tied behind her, and Owen Maron holds her while Craig Morgan puts the lariat over her head and adjusts the noose.

"In God's name I beg you to spare my life," she implores. "My eyes are now opened, and I see you as you are. My love is suddenly as dead as though it had never been."

"Ha, ha, ha!" again, mockingly. "And you will soon be as dead as your love, too. Up with her, Owen, and let us away." And then together the two heartless knaves pull, the woman is dragged up from a sitting posture, is swung nearly as high as the limb, the end of the lariat is hastily made fast, and with one look at their work the two scoundrels hurry away from the scene, leaving the writhing body swaying to and fro.

CHAPTER II.

A HEINOUS CRIME.

"I AM not answerable to you, Munson Kilgore."

"We will see about that. If you have a weapon, prepare to defend yourself."

"But I have no weapon—I am totally disarmed. I have no quarrel with you, and I refuse to be drawn into one. Let me pass."

"Not so fast, Valentine Hamilton. If you are disarmed, so much the better for me and the worse for you. I have lured you here with a purpose, and that purpose is—to kill you."

An early morning hour, as before.

The scene, a broad plateau overlooking a deep, shadowy gorge.

Two young, good-looking men face each other, one with back to the gorge, the other before him with drawn revolver.

The one is entirely at the mercy of the other, and at the last words—words spoken with murderous emphasis, his face grows pale. A glance is enough to read the other's intent.

"You do not intend to murder me?" he gasps.

"We cannot both possess Gulnare Montrose, and I have taken oath that she shall be mine."

"But, she does not care for you, and you cannot hope to win her hand, even with me out of your path. She knows you for the villain you are."

"Have a care, Valentine Hamilton, or I will drop you in your tracks."

"You can do no worse than you have declared is your intention. Give me a weapon, and give me a chance for my life."

"Do you take me for a fool? I offered to do that, thinking you must be armed and I could not help myself; but, since you are not armed, so much the better, as I said."

"Curse you for the cold-blooded knave you are! You would murder me, without anything to be gained by the dastardly crime. Yes; I do take you for a fool, for none but a fool would think of doing such a thing. You can never hope to marry Gulnare."

"You're a liar! She was as good as mine before you showed your accursed face at Rough-and-Tumble."

"I know better than that, for I know how utterly she despises you. You never had the ghost of a chance of winning her, and never can have."

"We will see about that, too. I shall have one chance the more with you out of my way, that is certain; and, curse you! I am going to put you out of my way here and now!"

"Put down that weapon, and let me meet you on equal footing. I will fight you, and will kill you if I can, too, as you richly deserve!"

"Haven't a doubt about your willingness to try it, if I give you the chance, which I have no intention of doing. I have not lured you here and shown you my hand in the game for nothing. Quick enough you were to respond when you

thought that note to you came from Gulnare Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not least among your villainies was that of forging her name to the note that brought me here and placed me in your power. Heaven's curse will rest upon you, if you carry out the threat you have uttered against me. You had better think twice before you go too far in your evil work. Would that I had a weapon at my command, and I would show—"

"Little good it would do you if you had, for I hold the drop, as you can see. Where do you prefer to have the bullet? Name your spot, and there I'll try to put it."

"Do you intend to murder me, Munson Kilgore?"

"Can you doubt it, after what has been said?"

"Yes, I can; for it seems impossible. Surely you—"

"Then doubt no more. In one minute you die, and Gulnare Montrose shall be my bride in spite of everything! Say your little prayer, if you know one, and have any idea that it will—"

"Curse you! I'll choke—"

With that fierce interruption, the defenseless man springs forward with the rage of a tiger, straight at the throat of his enemy, but the revolver speaks, and he is suddenly checked.

He stops, claps his hand to his head, and, in the same moment, begins to reel backward to the edge of the plateau. One brief moment he sways upon the brink, and then over he goes and down—

A smile—a fierce, devilish smile, lights up the face of the murderer.

"Ha! that was well done," he mutters. "That is one step in the right direction, anyhow."

Coolly he takes the empty shell from the weapon, tosses it over the ledge and puts a loaded one in its place, and thrusts the weapon into his pocket.

"There will be a missing man at Rough-and-Tumble," he says, half aloud, as he turns away from the scene of his crime, "and a vacancy at the Pay Dirt Mine. Mungo Montrose will be hunting around for a new superintendent. It was well done— Ha, ha, ha! It was well done, and no one can ever suspect me."

CHAPTER III.

AN INCIDENT AT ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE.

ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE was a rough-and-tumble camp forsooth.

It was about as rough a mining-camp as the imagination can picture, and yet it was seasoned withal with a little salt of respectability.

But the sprinkling was so sparse that the rude element largely predominated, and the sober, orderly, law-abiding citizens had but little voice in the public affairs of the place.

The vital spark of the camp was the Pay Dirt Mine. Without that, the place would not have existed, or at best would have been but a meager settlement of perhaps a dozen shanties—and the indispensable saloon. But the "Pay Dirt" was there, and the camp was of greater importance.

There was, then, first, the mine, with its office and buildings. Then, next in importance, from the minority point of view, the residence of the president and manager. After that, in order, the hotel, post-office, saloon, and the shanties in general. But from the other standpoint, from the majority point of view, this order of things was reversed.

First in order, as it was first in importance, comes the saloon—the "Swill-tub Saloon," as it was known. Next, perhaps, the post-office, and after that the hotel of the camp, which rejoiced in a strikingly unique name—the "Bedbug Bungalow." Came then the shanties in general, and so on down the scale to the last and least item of all, the mine. And the rough element in the majority, as stated, this was the generally-accepted register.

From the minority point of view again, the leading and most important personage about the camp was Mr. Mungo Montrose, the president and manager of the Pay Dirt. After him lie family and their immediate associates, and so on down the social gamut to the point where the line was drawn. On the other hand, from the majority view of the matter, the leading man of the camp was one Big-foot Brown, a great giant of a fellow, who held the office of mayor, much to the disgust—the secret disgust—of the better class of citizens. A great, swaggering, bully, a fellow full of fight, he was cock of the walk.

Coming into Rough-and-Tumble in the forenoon of a pleasant day, we find the camp in a turmoil of excitement.

"Judge Lynch," in the person of Big-foot Brown, the mayor, has opened his court on the space in front of the saloon and hotel, and sits upon his box ready to hear a case.

A great, wild crowd is gathered around, and a little distance away come half a score of men, dragging after them three unwilling Chinamen, with ropes around their necks. And as they come nearer the crowd breaks out in a wild cheering.

"Order in ther court!" cries the judge, pounding with his heel upon the box on which his chair stands. "Order in ther court, ye noisy galoots, ye! or I'll git me down from hyar an' knock ther stuffin' out of a dozen or two of ye. Bring on ther yaller cusses, boyees, an' we'll make short work of 'em."

The cheering is choked off, and is speedily ended, while the Chinamen are pulled into the space in front of the judge's stand.

As pale as the natural hue of their skin will admit, the poor wretches look frightened nearly to death, and are protesting loudly and wildly against the treatment they are getting.

"No hang Sam Yip," the foremost cries, as they are brought around face to the judge. "No hang Sam Yip. Him alla samee good Chinaman; him no stealee. Only him do washee-washee alla samee like rest of Chinamans. No hang Sam Yip—no hang Sam Yip!" And the others echo his wail.

"Shut up!" cries the judge. "Shut up, ye durn yaller skunks! Shut up—shut up! If yer don't, I'm a sickly coyote if I don't order ye took off an' hanged, ther same as I intend ter do, anyhow. Keep yer heads shut, now, an' let's git this business done ez soon as we kin."

"Hyar ther cusses is, mayor!" speaks up the leader of the men who have them in tow. "We yanked 'em right out of ther washee tubs an' off'n ther ironin' board. What is goin' ter be done with 'em?"

"We is goin' ter hang 'em, in course, that's what," the rough mayor declares. "We'll give 'em somethin' of a hearin' fu'st, hows'ever, fer ther sake o' form."

"That's ther talk!" cheers the ruffianly crowd. "No Chinese need apply hyar now, you bet!"

"You shut up," Big-foot sternly orders, glaring round.

"I'm shut," the prompt obedience.

"You yaller cusses, tend ter me: We has made up our minds that we don't intend ter have ye 'round hyar any longer. Fer ther reason and ter git rid of ye in ther shortest possible time, we is goin' ter hang ye. Now you has had a fair an' square trial, an' that's the verdict. Take 'em an' string 'em up, boyees."

With one voice the three prisoners set up a wail most piteous, and resist with all their strength.

But, resistance is useless, and they are on the point of being dragged away to their fate when other actors appear on the scene.

Two women broke through the crowd, almost out of breath, and one is calling out to the judge to hold on until he has heard them in the Chinamen's behalf.

"Hold on a minit, then, boyees!" the mayor commands; "hyar's the ladies, an' it wouldn't be perlit ter refuse 'em a say in ther matter. It won't make much difference with ther verdict."

There is a halt, and the prisoners are brought back.

"You are not going to hang the poor wretches, are you, sir?" the foremost of the women asks, breathlessly.

"Why, yas, ter be sure," is the assurance. "That's ther best way ter git rid of 'em, yer knows. If you and yer pard thar has come hyer ter set up a washee, by ther horn spoon yer sha'n't have no yaller opposition!"

"But, sir, we do not want you to hang the poor fellows. If we had known they were established here, we would have gone on to some other camp. Let them go back to their work, please, and we will go on. It wouldn't be fair for us to come here and drive them out."

"Ther darnation it wouldn't! You jest let me be ther jedge of that. Hyer you comes to our camp, you and yer woman pard thar, an' says ye are two poor women as wants ter set up a mill an' do honest washin' an' mendin' fer us. We hears yer story, an' makes up our minds ter give ye a show, an' now, durn me, if ye don't want ter spile our fun."

"Don't be offended, sir; but we wouldn't want to cause the death of the poor wretches, you know. Unless you will let them go, we won't stay here, anyhow. You must not hang them!"

"Waal, I ber durn if wimmin ain't queer crit-

ters! Here I thort I would be doin' ye a honor, by hangin' ther cusses in ther quickest sort o' way, an' now yer says they mustn't hang. Waal, waal, wimmin is past my onderstandin', anyhow."

"No, sir; they must not be hanged," the woman firmly protests. "We had much rather move on and leave them in peace—"

"No, blast it! yer can't do that 'ar! We wants yer to stay hyer. Yer is in need, an' Rough-an-Tumble ain't ther camp ter give its patronage to yaller beathen an' let wimmin go beggin'; nary time."

"Very well, then; if you want to keep us here you must let these fellows go; and, not only so, but you must help them to pack up their belongings and to get away. On no other conditions will we remain with you, much as we would like to stay."

"That settles it, then," Big-foot cries. "Yer is goin' ter stay, an' I'm what says so. Let ther cusses go, boyees, an' some of ye help 'em ter pack up an' git out. I don't see as it makes a heap of odds jest how we gits rid of 'em, after all."

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE MILD FUN.

It had been on the previous night that these women had made their first appearance at Rough-and-Tumble. Together they had entered the Bedbug Bungalow and inquired for lodging. And having had something to eat, they told their story to the crowd that had gathered curiously around.

They were from the far Northwest, and were gradually working their way East. They would like to stop for some weeks, or perhaps months, at this camp, and do washing and mending for the men. This was the manner in which they were working toward their destination.

One, the elder, claimed to be a widow, and gave her name as Lamb. The other, she said was her sister, whose name was Katy Dansen. They were roughly, almost shabbily clad, wearing men's hats and the roughest of shoes, and had the appearance of having tramped many a mile.

They were not bad-looking women, and in truth, had they been more becomingly attired, might have been called good-looking. Their ages were anything between twenty-five and forty. Description in particular is unnecessary. The Widow Lamb was the one who did the talking for both, her sister seeming to be of a retiring disposition.

As soon as their story had been told, the mayor took the matter in hand promptly.

"Yer shell stay hyar, you let!" he declared. "An' we'll give ye our trade too. Ther galoot what don't pat'nize ye will hear somethin' drop, an' I'm what says so. I'm mayor of this hyar burgh, ladies; Reginald Brown, at yer service. You jest go ter roost an' take it easy, an' me an' ther boyees will go to ther Swill-tub an' talk it over. That's Regy Brown's orate; you hear!"

And with that he went off, his followers at his heels, and the women took his advice and retired to their room.

At the Swill-tub the matter was discussed at length.

The camp had a "washee-washee" already, one that was managed by the three Chinamen, and it was a plain fact that there was not enough trade to keep two institutions of that kind running.

"The Chinese must go!" was the final conclusion.

"We'll tend to 'em in ther mornin'," spoke Big-foot Brown. "We'll wait on ther wimmin an' tell 'em it's all right, an' then we'll step over an' hang ther yaller cusses an' ther hull business will be arranged."

But somebody mentioned the unfairness of hanging them without a trial, so it was further arranged that they should be tried before they were hurried off.

Accordingly, next morning the mayor and some of his followers went to the hotel and informed the women that they would soon have a vacant shanty ready for them, and from there went to attend to the Chinamen.

Big-foot prepared his court while the others went for the prisoners, and as has been shown, there would have been speedy hanging, had not some knowledge of what was going on reached the women, who hastened to the scene and balked the mayor's programme in the manner shown.

At the mayor's order, the frightened celestials were allowed to go, and they made a dash for their shanty like escaping rats running for a hole.

"Look out thar! Head ther cusses off!" the mayor shouted. "If they gits in thar they'll

try ter hold ther fort! Head 'em off, an' don't give 'em no chance ter do nothin' o' that kind."

After them part of the crowd ran, pell-mell, and it was a close race, but, as the Chinamen dodged into their shanty, there were enough men close upon their heels to prevent their shutting the door.

"That war a close shave, by darn!" exclaimed the mayor, as he witnessed it from his tribunal. "Orter been kicked fer not thinkin' o' that. We has got 'em now, an' in half a hour you will see 'em ambulin' out of ther valley, ladies."

"It seems too bad," the Widow Lamb observed, "but you have made up your minds that we shall stay, so I suppose—"

"Bet yer life on't!" the mayor assured. "Wimmin is at a premium hyar, an' mebbly both of yer will be able to pick up a purty decent sort o' husband out of ther galoots 'round ther camp."

"Oh! no, no!" the widow protested, laughing. "We shall not seek for any greater honor than to do your washing and mending, gentlemen."

"But yer will want some galoot ter chop wood and make fires," one fellow spoke up.

"And husbands generally object to that, you know," was the response.

The crowd gave a laugh, and the women went off in the direction of the Chinamen's shanty.

There the crowd had dragged the poor Celestials out again, and were moving their belongings after them at a lively pace.

"Hold on just a moment, gentlemen," the Widow Lamb requested. "We are here without any traps of our own, and are prepared to buy these of the Chinamen at a fair price. We must buy or hire made, and if we can buy these we can begin business at once. See if the fellows understand."

"Does yer understand that 'ar?" demanded the mayor, who had followed to the shanty. "What does yer say to it, Sammy?"

Sam Yip could speak English fairly well, and could understand it a good deal better than he could speak it.

"Hund'ed dlollars," he quickly set his figure. "Givee Sam Yip hund'ed dlollars money, and Chinamans gitee out alla samee quick."

That was brief and right to the point.

"It is more than fair that we should pay them something," the Widow Lamb remarked, "seeing that we are not only taking their traps but their business as well, and as we have about that sum we will pay it."

"Not by er dol-garned sight!" cried Big-foot Brown. "Ther hull durn outfit ain't wuth more'n twenty-five cents, an' ther pizen cusses hev salted down a good many dollars sence they has been hyar. Yer had better let us hang 'em, ma'm, as we was goin' ter do. It will be a good deal cheaper."

At mention of this, Sam Yip and his companions turned pale again, and seemed on the point of running for their lives.

"Twenty-fi' dlollars," Sam Yip suddenly came down. "Givee twenty-fi' dlollars, and takee evelythin'."

"Here is the money," said the widow, passing it over.

"An' now jest see how quick you kin get out of pistol range," suggested the mayor, significantly touching his revolver butt.

But again did the woman interfere. She wanted the Chinamen to be allowed a sufficient time to gather up whatever personal effects the sale did not include, and offered to assist them.

"Waal, go ahead," Big-foot drawled. "Wimmin beats my time all holler, an' I'm what says so. This hull business might a' been done, an' ther cusses half buried by this time. But, go ahead, and when you git done I reckon we'll have some fun."

Sam Yip was quick to take in the situation, and communicating to his brothers in tribulation the respite that had been granted, all three hastened into the shanty to gather up their effects, the women with them.

Sam understood that his only friend in the whole crowd was the widow, and as she approached him, when they were within doors, he was not alarmed.

"Here, put this out of sight and say nothin'," she remarked, in whispers, extending another sum of money to him. "This will surely repay you for all loss and inconvenience. Say nothin'."

The Chinaman grinned from ear to ear.

"Me savvy," he muttered, and the money disappeared under his blouse with remarkable promptitude.

Some "tall hustling" was done by the three heathens in their scramble to get their valuables, and particularly the sums of money they had buried in one corner of the floorless back shed.

Pretty soon they had made up their several

parcels, and were ready, and with a nod to the Widow Lamb, Sam Yip led the way out.

"Waal, have yer got it all now?" demanded the mayor, somewhat impatiently.

"Yes, alla samee gottee him now," responded Sam, with another grin.

"Then git a move on ye, instanter! We will give ye ten seconds ter git out o' range, an' then we're goin' ter open fire. Now, git!"

"You betee!" cried the Chinaman, and he was off at once, with his companions at his heels.

Their every effort was strained to put distance between themselves and the crowd in as short a space of time as possible.

The crowd yelled and hooted, some shots were fired in the air, and the three ran as fast as their legs could be put in motion.

They were allowed to get some little distance away, when the whole crowd let off a volley, not trying to hit the fugitives, however, and the last that was seen of the frightened Orientals was the cloud of dust that remained behind after they had rounded a bend that carried them out of range.

CHAPTER V.

HUMBLE HOLDER OF A MIGHTY SECRET.

AT this time Rough-and-Tumble had a month-old mystery.

That mystery was regarding the sudden and unaccountable disappearance of one of the camp's most popular citizens—Valentine Hamilton, superintendent of the Pay Dirt Mine. And it was a mystery without a parallel in the camp's history—a mystery that had defied every effort to solve it.

Mungo Montrose, president and manager of the mine, had offered a large reward for information concerning him, but nothing had been learned, and now it did not appear likely that anything would be heard of him. It was the general opinion that for some secret reason he had suddenly taken himself off.

But there was one person in the camp who would not believe this.

That person was Guldare Montrose, daughter of the mine president. She was firm in her conviction that the missing man had met with foul play.

Asked to give her reasons, her answer was that Mr. Hamilton had been a man of too much honor to do anything of that sort; but, urged to point her suspicions, she could not do so.

The fact was, that Valentine Hamilton was gone—that he had gone very suddenly. No one had seen him since the night previous to his disappearance. Then he had seemed to be about as usual in every respect, so far as noticed. Next day he had failed to appear at the mine.

Examination into the matter had shown that he had occupied his bunk in the mine office that night as usual—where he had been in the habit of sleeping. He had probably gone out early, and had locked the door of the office after him in going. But, *where* had he gone? Why? What had become of him? Questions that could not be answered.

No one at the camp claimed to possess any ability as a detective; still, many had taken keenest interest in the matter, and had investigated as far as possible. Looking into Hamilton's career since his arrival at the camp, two years before, there was not a spot to be found on his record.

Big-foot Brown, to begin at the top of the list, socially and officially, as considered from the majority standpoint, had lent the best energies of his massive intellect to the task of unraveling the knotty problem, but had given up in despair. He had begun with the theory of foul play, but when he had been the rounds of all the bad and desperate characters of the camp, and had been unable to fasten suspicion upon any one, he gave that up and cast his vote with those who believed the young man had simply gone off for reasons best known to himself.

And then, to drop at once to the bottom of the list, socially and officially, still looking at it from the majority point of view, Mungo Montrose had exerted himself to the utmost to learn something about the missing man. He had offered rewards, as has been shown, and besides that, had gone into the matter himself, making a most thorough investigation of it. Not a man, woman or child in all the camp had escaped his questionings regarding the missing man. But it all brought him nothing, and finally he too gave up. It looked as though it would prove to be one of those occasional mysteries which are never solved.

There was yet another personage who had taken a hand in the work of sifting for the secret. This was Munson Kilgore, a man

who occupied a position about half-way up (or down) the scale social and unofficial. He was manager of the mining company's supply store, and held the office of postmaster. A rather good-looking young man, he had the regard, to a considerable extent, of the citizens in both divisions of the social gamut. At the Swill-tub, where he occasionally took a fling, as he called it, he was able to hold up his end with the worst of them. On the other hand, he could so conduct himself that he did not seem out of place even in the best room of the Montrose residence. He had done his level best, as he declared, and his conclusion was that it must be as the majority believed. If not that, then it must be that he had met with an accident. It did not seem possible that a man so well liked could have met with foul play.

But the theory of accident was not given much weight, since, if an accident, the man would have been found somewhere; so it had come, at last, to be drawn down to the one point mentioned, except in the mind of Miss Montrose.

From what has been said, the part played by this Munson Kilgore can be appreciated. And he confidently believed that the truth of the matter would never come to light.

Perhaps it never would, and certainly that seemed to be the way it looked at this time. But there was yet another personage of whom mention must be made in this connection.

This was a simple youth, a half-wit, known about the camp as Silly Bob. He was a harmless fellow, too silly to be even the object of rude jests, yet he was not altogether bereft of thought and reason.

Naturally, as is the case with such persons, he had his likes and his dislikes, and one of his dislikes was Munson Kilgore. Why he had avoided him from the first, no one knew, and perhaps he himself could not have told. But, suddenly, that aversion had grown to actual fear of the man.

Within the month, Silly Bob had shunned Kilgore to such a degree that he even avoided meeting him on the street if he could do so. He would go around the whole camp to his objective point rather than come face to face with the man he seemed to fear so greatly. Some had noticed it, and it was considered quite a joke.

On one occasion, a few days succeeding the disappearance of the superintendent, Bob happened to be passing the hotel when Kilgore stepped out right in front of him. Bob gave a whoop that would have done credit to a Sioux, and turned to run, but Kilgore caught him by the collar and gave him a shaking that made his teeth rattle. He demanded to know why the youth feared him, declaring that he would harm nobody; but Bob only yelled the more, and when he was released, ran screaming from the scene.

The witnesses to this enjoyed it, but Bob rather had the sympathy of even the worst and roughest, and Kilgore understood that it would not do to abuse the poor fool, however much he might be tempted to kick him whenever he saw him.

On this occasion Silly Bob had run screaming all the way home, that is, to the only home he knew at the camp, and that was the shanty of the three Chinamen. He was made use of by them to carry water from the creek to supply their tubs, and they used him so well that he rather liked them.

He stopped his screaming as he entered, and passing hurriedly through, sat down on one of his pails behind the outer shed of the shanty, and there rocking himself to and fro, muttered in his accustomed way.

"If Bob only dare tell what he know!" his words ran. "Bob know where poor Hamilton be, but Bob can't tell; 'fraid he get sent same place. Ooh! Ooh!" and he half screamed again in undertone. "It was awful—awful—awful!"

And he rocked to and fro, to and fro, moaning and crooning, as only a person similarly afflicted can do.

"No, no, no!" he finally cried out, "Bob can't tell—Bob 'fraid to tell—'fraid to tell! Kilgore would kill me! Shoot me—push me over ledge—ooh! No, no, no! Bob never can tell! Poor Hamilton—poor man, poor man! Bob tell, then he get sent in same way—No, no! Bob never tell! Nobody would believe poor, Silly Bob, anyhow."

So, on that occasion, he had taken on, and many times since he had been found in similar great distress, till it was the opinion that he was rapidly losing the little spark of wit that had been given him.

Had his mutterings been intelligible, perhaps something of it all would have been gathered up, but they were not, or not to any extent, and it would have required great patience and considerable time to have got at the truth,

even had there been any suspicion to lead any one to make Bob a study.

His fear of Kilgore rather increased, until now he could hardly see him without a scream rising to his lips and his limbs trembling under him as though ready to let him to the ground.

And this Silly Bob, after the Chinamen had been run out of the camp, suddenly made his debut into the shanty and into the presence of the two women, taking off his hat and fingering it nervously, while he rolled his eyes from one to the other in his idiotic way.

"Well, and who are you?" asked the Widow Lamb, not unkindly.

"Please, I'm Silly Bob," was the timid response.

"And what do you want?" the natural question followed.

"Please, I carried water fer Sam Yip."

The Widow Lamb caught the situation at once, or thought she did. She had noticed that the water had to be brought from the creek.

"Oh, that is it, is it?" she pleasantly remarked. "And perhaps you want to see if your services will be needed any longer, now that the establishment has changed hands?"

The silly fellow made it understood that such was the idea he had dimly in view, and when he had been finally assured, kindly, that he might still make his home there, and continue to carry water as before, tears sprung to his pale, weak eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

HAMILTON'S SUCCESSOR.

THE two women began business forthwith, and received a rush of custom that ought to have made their hearts glad—to say nothing of making their backs ache.

They attended strictly to business, worked early and late, and after a few days, when the novelty of the thing had worn off, no more attention was paid to them than the requirements of business made necessary.

Up to within a week or so previous to the coming of these women to the camp, Mungo Montrose had been superintending the Pay Dirt Mine himself, in the hope that Hamilton would eventually reappear. But, as time passed, and there seemed no likelihood of his doing so, had at last put up a notice announcing that a new superintendent was wanted to take charge of the mine.

There had been several applications, but by men who did not suit the manager, in one way and another, and the post was still vacant. And it remained vacant, too, until some time after the two women had opened their laundry.

About a week after the laundry had changed hands, there came one day a new applicant for the position of mine superintendent.

It was in the person of a good-looking man of fine figure, having clear-cut features, dark hair and eyes, and a dark full beard that was rather closely trimmed and which became him well.

Entering the office with a brisk, business-like air, he commanded the respect of the rather testy president of the company, to whom he announced that he was there to make application for the place that was vacant.

"Ha! you want the post of superintendent, do you?" Mr. Montrose rejoined.

"That is what has brought me here," was the response. "Hearing of the vacancy, I thought I would drop down this way and apply."

"Where do you hail from?"

"From further north and west. My name is Reuben Randal."

"Well, you have had experience, Mr. Randal, of course. It is not likely that you would apply unless you had had."

"Not very likely. If you want a man, take me and use me for awhile, and in that manner find out whether I am the one you want or not. If I am not, you will be at liberty to tell me so, and no harm done."

"That's fair enough, certainly, and I will admit that I rather like your appearance and manner. But what about the question of salary?"

"I will take hold at the same rate you were paying your last superintendent, if that is satisfactory."

"Which I am afraid it isn't. You see, Hamilton had been with us a little more than two years, and we had recently raised his pay. I will pay you at the rate of what his salary had been, to begin with."

"And how much was that?"

"Two hundred a month."

"That will do. I will take hold, if you want me."

"Well, you may take hold, Mr. Randal; but it must be with a certain understanding."

"And what is that? I am willing to agree to

anything that is reasonable and fair. Anything that ain't— But, let me hear what it is."

"It is something which I think you will agree with me is both reasonable and fair. Mr. Hamilton left us very suddenly, very mysteriously. We cannot account for his disappearance. Should he return, showing good reason for his absence and desiring to take his old place, I should feel inclined to let him have it."

"Then the vacancy was not made by a resignation?"

"No; as I have just said. Hamilton's disappearance is a mystery that has been puzzling us for more than a month. No one can imagine why he went, where he went, or how, or when. One morning he was simply gone, and that is all we know about it. I cannot account for it—do not pretend to account for it. There was no reason why he should go, so far as can be seen. On the other hand, it looks as though there was every reason for his remaining."

"Well, that does savor of mystery, true enough. Under the circumstances, I will take the place with the understanding that if Mr. Hamilton does return he is to have it."

"Nothing fairer can be asked, Mr. Randal. When will you assume the duties?"

"Just as soon as you have a mind to introduce me to the men and put me in charge."

"Very well, we will let it be this afternoon. And now let me give you some hints regarding the mine and the camp in general."

"The more the better, sir. A new man cannot have too much information of that sort to begin with. The better he understands the lay of the land, the better for him and all."

"I agree with you. Now Hamilton was a very successful superintendent. He was liked by everybody, and had the good will of everybody. For that reason, we have made up our minds fully that he cannot have met with foul play. It does not seem possible."

"Ha! Then it was suggested that he had met with foul play?"

"Yes; but there was no proof of it, and under the circumstances I do not see that there was any foundation for thinking so. Still, my daughter holds to that idea with stubborn tenacity."

"Your daughter, eh?"

"Yes; she and Hamilton were quite friendly—in fact, I suspect their regard had gone beyond that stage."

"Has your daughter any theory to offer in support of what she holds so determinedly? Is there any foundation for her believing that the man met with foul play of any sort?"

"No; there does not appear to be. Her idea seems even less probable to me than that of Mr. Kilgore's. He set forth the view that Hamilton had perhaps met with some accident; but, if so, it seems to me he would have been found. No; he must have gone of his own accord, for some good reason."

"It looks so. But, as you were about to say—"

"Ah, yes. I was on the point of telling you something about the camp. We have a rough place here, sir—a regular rough-and-tumble hole indeed. The ruffianly element is largely in the majority, and your success will depend upon your ability to gain and hold the regard of that class."

"Glad to know the exact situation. I will try and govern myself so as to bring things about in the desired way."

Mr. Montrose went ahead from that point, then, telling Mr. Randal all that has been set forth in the previous pages regarding the camp and her denizens.

The new superintendent gave close attention to everything, and finally brought the conversation back again to the subject relating to the missing man. He appeared to be interested in that.

"Yes," said Mr. Montrose in answer to a question, "he was without a single enemy in the whole camp, so far as any of us knew. It is simply one of the greatest mysteries that ever came under my observation. Why, have you an idea of trying to get at the bottom of it?"

"Oh, no; but naturally it interests me, seeing that I am to fill the place made vacant so peculiarly. By the way, where was Hamilton from? Have you corresponded with his relations about him?"

"He was from the East, and I sent word to his brother, whose address I happened to know. A reply from him says it is unaccountable, as Valentine was not the fellow to do anything of that sort. Should he turn up there, they will let me know at once."

"And in the mean time there is nothing more that can be done, I suppose?"

"No; not that I can see. I have offered

liberal rewards, and every man in the camp has tried his hand at the case without any success whatever. It is one of those things which only time can straighten out."

"You may be right, and no doubt you are; but, have you tried what a detective might do in the matter?"

"No, we haven't; and what's the use? We have all been detectives, every man of us, and we haven't found even a clew. Why, there's Kilgore; he's as sharp-nosed as any detective, I dare say, and even he had to give it up."

"But still a professional, coming into the camp unknown to any one, might be able to pick up something important where any one else would fail. They know just how to set at work, and something might come of it. It would do no harm to try it, anyhow."

"I thought about it, but cast the idea away as useless. Still, as you say, it might lead to something. I will think about it further. But, from the interest you manifest, I suppose you will be trying a back at it. Go ahead, if you are so inclined, and may good luck attend you. If you can solve the mystery of Hamilton's disappearance, the reward shall be yours."

But Randal had little thought that he should be able to discover anything, and after some further talk the subject was dropped.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTERESTING ARRIVAL.

THE shades of night were falling over the camp, some days later, when into the pocket in which the camp nestled rode a young Irishman mounted upon a mule.

It needed no question to determine that he was Irish, for his voice proclaimed it. His brogue was unmistakable. He was singing away at the top of his voice, and drew attention as he approached.

He had just ended the wild, meaningless chorus of a rollicking song as he came in sight, his singing having been heard long before he could be seen; and as he rode leisurely up the street toward the center of the camp he launched out into another verse, as follows:

"Bryan O'Linn had no breeches to wear,
So he bought him a sheepskin to make him a pair;
With the skinny side out and the woolly side in,
'They're nice, light and cool,' says Bryan O'Linn."

And then off into the chorus he went as before, and by the time he had come to the end he was at the Swill-tub Saloon.

"How are ye, b'ys, wan an' all?" he cried, as he brought his mule to a stop. "Av it wasn't so late in the day Oi would say, Dhe top av dhe mornin' to ye. As it is, ye must take dhe will fur dhe deed, an' no more said about it."

"Who ther dickens be ye?" demanded Big-foot Brown, who happened to be on hand.

"Who else, but mesel'," was the good-natured answer. "Sure, it's naythur me father nor me brother Oi am."

"Ye thunderin' lunkhead," cried Big-foot, "any darn fool would know that."

"Dhen phwy for did ye be askin'?"

A howl of laughter followed, much to the disgust of the mayor.

The new-comer needs no introduction, if the reader has perused any of the preceding stories. It was Barney O'Linn—Barney, the original, the inimitable.

"Confound your stupid head!" the mayor howled, "can't yer understand nothin'? I axed ye who ye be yerself; not who ye be somebody else. See if yer kin grip ther meanin' o' that."

Barney took off his apology for a hat and scratched his head vigorously.

"Begob, but Oi have no recollection of yer askin' me any'ting av dhe koind," he responded, in a puzzled way. "But dhat don't matther. Phwat ye want to know is who Oi am mesel', an' not who Oi am somebody else. Sure it is mesel' Oi am all dhe toime, an' nobody else at all."

"Well, then, blast it, who is yerself?"

"Arrah! Now it is makin' av it plain ye are! Sure Oi am Barney O'Linn, at yer service—son av dhe famous Bryan O'Linn, whose praises ye just heard me chantin' as Oi kem into dhe camp. Sure ye must have heard of him. He was dhe pride av dhe family, so he was—dhe flower av dhe flock, as it were." And of a sudden, off he went into another verse of his song:

"Bryan O'Linn had no watch for to wear,
So he got him a turnip an' scooped it out fair;
He then put a cricket cl'ane under dhe skin,
'They'd think it's a tickin',' says Bryan O'Linn."

"An' dhat's dhe sort av a b'y me daddy was," he cried, when he came again to the end of the long and wordy chorus. "Sure Oi remember

him well, though he died a couple of years before Oi was born."

This raised another laugh, and Barney was taken for just what he was, an original character.

"How the dickens kin ye remember him, if he died before ye was born?" demanded a voice in the crowd.

"Did Oi say dhat?" asked Barney, innocently. "That's what yer did."

"Sure Oi meant to say it was mesel' as died a couple av years before he was born, which will make it sound betther."

This time the crowd was almost wild.

"Phwat's dhe matter wid ye all?" Barney asked, innocently as before. "Sure is it makin' fun av me ye are?"

"His father born a couple of years before he died— Haw, haw, haw!" and one man in the crowd almost went into fits, while the others laughed the more at his poor attempt at repeating.

"Begorra, it was somehow dhat way, anyhow," Barney soberly insisted. "Maybe it was me mother dhat was born a couple av years after me father died. I dunno just how it was now. But, no matther. Here Oi am, dhe ranting, roaring son av dhe original Bryan. Hear me sing."

With that he rendered another verse of what seemed to be his favorite song, as follows:

"Bryan O'Linn he bought him a gun,
He planted dhe trigger right under his thumb,
He pulled dhe trigger, dhe gun gave a crack,
And knocked Bryan O'Linn on dhe broad av his back."

"Yis, Begorra, so it did; an' by the same token dhis is dhe same gun Oi have wid me now." And as he said this he held up to view a big musket with which he was armed. It was one of the old-fashioned kind.

"Oi don't belave it was ever foired but dhat wanst," he added. "Sure it is Oi have never foired it mesel', but Oi kape it loaded an' primed ready fur action, an' av ever Oi do have occasion to use it—*whew!* Dhere will be a ruction around, you bet! Sure it carries enough buck-shot to sink a ship, more or less."

His odd ditty and quaint remarks had won for him the good will of the crowd, even to Big-foot Brown, and he was by this time the center of an admiring circle.

"An' how about yer mule?" questioned the mayor. "Ain't that somethin' else that belonged to Bryan O'Linn? It won't do ye any harm ter stretch out a few more of yer mighty lies, I reckon."

"Lies, is it!" echoed Barney. "Sure Oi will have ye to know dhat no O'Linn was ever guilty av tellin' lies, no more he was. Yis, dhis same mule was wanst the property av me father, dhe same as dhe gun. Oi will sing to ye about dhat, but in dhe song dhe mule is mentioned as a horse. Me father got ch'ated in him, ye see. He bought him fur a horse, an' he never knowed dhe difference; but he often said he would loike to fall in wid dhe gossoon phwat ch'ated him so outrageously."

"But, ther song, ther song!" urged some one in the crowd.

Thereupon Barney threw back his head and started another verse, in his clear and ringing voice, as follows:

"Bryan O'Linn went to bring his wife home,
He had but one horse, dhat was all skin an' bone,
He put her behind him as n'ate as a pin,
And her mother before him, did Bryan O'Linn."

"Dhat same he did, begob! And ye see he mitions dhe b'aste as a horse. He said never a toime would he call it a mule, no more he would. Oi have fed dhe critter up a bit since dhen, too. Don't crowd too close to him pl'ase. He is a divil at kickin', sometimes."

Barney's homely, honest face beamed with the best of good-nature, and he looked around over the crowd as though he wanted to have every man for his friend.

And the crowd, the while, was shouting for more of the song. It was something new, and in a way quite a treat.

"You're a son-of-a-gun on wheels!" cried the mayor. "Git down off'n that 'ar be-haw critter an' let's grip yer fin. Darn me if I don't sort of cotton to ye. You're the best singer ever struck Rough-an'-Tumble."

"Bet yer life be are!" was shouted. "He's a Jim dandy from Ballahoo!"

"Give us another verse, Irish!"

"That's ther ticket!"

"Dhat same Oi will do, to pl'aze ye," assented Barney. "Dhere ain't but wan more verse anyhow, an' sure ye may as well take dhe whole piece an' save me cuttin' off a remnant dhat

would be loikely to spoil on me hands. An' here ye have it:

"Bryan O'Linn and his wife and dhe mother, Dhey were all goin' over a bridge together, Dhe bridge broke down an' dhey all tumbled in; 'We'll find ground at dhe bottom,' says Bryan O'Linn."

With the ending of the wild chorus, Barney took off his apology of a hat and tossed it into the air, giving a wild Irish whoop as he did so, and when the hat came down, caught it on the end of his big gun.

"An' dhere ye have it," he cried, "dhe same as dhe shoemaker t'rowed at his wife—dhe last and dhe all av it. An' now, an' it pl'aze ye, Oi'll git mesel' down, have some wan to care fur me b'aste, an' av dhere is any'ting to ate in dhe place, begorra Oi am afther it."

The young Irishman was given a royal reception, and was soon eating his fill. He had made friends with the whole camp at once, apparently without an exception.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPARKLER THE SPORT.

THERE were other new arrivals in the camp that evening.

Business in the Swill-tub Saloon was at full blast, and the evening hour was ripening, when a hard-looking case sauntered lazily in.

He was rough, bearded, ragged and dirty—about as tough a customer as the camp could boast among her denizens, if not a little more so. A rag of a hat adorned his head, and his eyes looked rum-red and hazy.

"Waal, hyar I be," he cried, as he glared around the room, and every eye was upon him at once. "Ther five-cornered cattymount of ther ragin' wilderness. This hyar is me, citizens; Lazy Lunk, ther solid chunk o' raw tiger an' grizzly b'ar combined."

With that he braced his feet, wide apart, pushed his hat back from his face, with the front brim standing straight up in line with his nose, and jamming his fists down upon his hips, glared around in a challenging sort of way, as though he only wanted somebody to dispute his claim, when he would proceed to wipe up the floor with that somebody's person, or do some other desperate thing.

And he did not have to wait a very long time to find a man who dared retort.

"Waal, what if yer is hyar?" sung out Big-foot Brown. "Yer needn't think that nobody is goin' ter run away from yer, if yer is a combination o' tiger, lion an' wildcat all in one. We reckons that we kin tame yer, if it comes ter that so yer had better cool right down, an' don't make no rumpus hyar. An' now yer wants ter hold yer jaw, fer yer has interrupted ther consart."

By the "consart" he meant the singing. Barney O'Linn, being urged, had been giving them a few songs, and had been on the point of striking up another when this fellow had appeared on the scene.

"Interrupted ther consart, hev I?" the new-comer repeated. "An' what fer a kind o' consart was it? I don't see no bally-dancers around, nor nothin' of that kind. Say, what was it, anyhow? If it wasn't a first-class show, with extra trimmin's, bet yer life on't I kin beat it all holler meself."

"We was havin' some rattlin' good songs, that's what it was," cried the mayor, rather hotly. "An' now, you jest shut up an' sot down, or by durn if I don't make yer do it, that's all."

"Make me do it, hey? That kin I o' talk sort o' sounds like fight, Mister Man. Who mought you be, if I dare ter ax yer? Yer kin see how I'm tremblin' wi' fear as I do it! Don't speak too sharp at me, now, or I'll have a fit."

The fellow was wiggling his knees, pretending greatest fear, and the crowd began to scent some fun ahead. The mayor was not the man to stand much foolishness such as this.

"Yas, I'll make yer do it!" Big-foot cried, as he strode forward. "I am ther mayor of this hyar burgh, I'd have yer know, an' I don't allow no durn tramp ter come hyar an' sass me. Now you sot down, darn quick, or I'll take hold of yer neck and fling yer kerkiss through a windy. I'll—"

"I begs yer parding, boss, I begs yer parding!" the fellow cried, backing away and waving the mayor off. "I didn't know you was ther mayor of ther camp. It was all a mistake, I take me dinner it was! Wouldn't talk back to ther mayor fer nothin', if I knowed it. Ther mayor is ther law, an' ther law must an' shall be obeyed, every time. Selah!"

It was such a clear case of back-down that the crowd yelled itself hoarse in a few moments.

The fellow had taken off his hat and poked it under his arm, where he held it while he bowed and scraped desperately before the local monarch, exclaiming his apologies.

"Sot down, then, yer blowin' coyote," Big-foot ordered, "an' if I hear one peep out of yer, by darn if I con't come an' stan' ye on yer head. Fer two pins I'd do it anyhow, ter l'arn ye what manners is. Now, not another peep out of yer, an' mind it."

The fellow having dropped upon a chair, the mayor strode back to his place, swelling more than ever with self-importance at the immense way in which he had made this new arrival "take water."

"Now, then, Barney," he said, "go on with ther consart. If thar's any more noise out o' that galoot, thar will be a funeral ter-morrer, you bet! Now, let's have a hummer."

"Begob, but it's willin' Oi'd be, av Oi was any'ting av a singer," modestly prefaced the jolly young Celt. "As it is, ye will have to take up wid dhe best Oi can offer ye."

"Oh, come off!" was the shout. Barney cleared his throat, and soon another rollicking song was being rendered in his round, full voice.

While he was singing, yet another new-comer put in an appearance—a stranger, as before, but one the extreme opposite in point of appearance to the "cattymount."

He was a dandy, in matter of dress. Clad in a suit of finest black, with a high silk hat in keeping, and patent-leather boots, he shone like a tulip in a bed of weeds.

Kid gloves were on this spotless fellow's hands, his bosom and collar were of the whitest, and on the bosom shone a diamond of immense proportions and greatest brilliancy. He was about thirty in point of years, at a guess, and rather a good-looking individual.

"Well done!" he cried, when Barney had ended. "That was a good one, my laddy, and worthy of applause," and he clapped his gloved hands vigorously.

Immediately all attention was turned upon him. Few had noticed him till now, and many were the exclamations uttered.

"Great calibers!" cried Big-foot Brown, "what be it, anyhow? My! but it are a sparkler, an' no mistook 'bout that! Say, mister, what do yer take this hyar camp fur, anyhow? Do yer think yer is in some swell city of ther East? Them 'ar duds don't pass hyar."

"What fault have you got to find with my duds, my good man?" the stranger inquired, pleasantly.

"Don't call me yer good man," Big-foot snapped; "I'm a darn *bad* man, an' don't yer fergit it. Yer clothes is too fine ter stand ther atmosphere of this hyar camp, that's what's ther difficulty with 'em."

"Oh, you are mistaken there," was the smiling response. "I have worn them for some time, and in places fully as rough as this camp of yours, and there isn't a wrinkle in a wrong place about them yet, and I have given them some rough usage, too. I am quite able to take care of them."

"Oh, yer is, is yer? Now mebbly you only think so. If I had a rotten egg I think I'd try a shy at that 'ar hat, jest fer ther fun of it. We don't 'low no high hats hyar, nohow. Thar was Montrose, when he fu't kem hyer. He trotted out a plug on Sunday, but he didn't trot it in again. Thar was nothin' left of it, you bet. We kin stand some things, but not that."

"And do you know what I would do if you were to throw a rotten egg at my hat, my fine fellow?"

"Don't yer call me that 'ar, nuther! No; I don't know what you'd do, but I sort o' reckon that ye'd run like sin ter escape gettin' another dose of ther same. I do, by darn."

"That's where you mistake. I would make you eat a raw egg—no, I mean a rotten one, and if you didn't keep it down I'd make you take another. Now if you want to throw any eggs at me, go right ahead!"

"Thunderation!" cried the mayor, hardly able to believe that he had heard aright. "Did yer hear what he said ter me, boyees? What he said ter me—me, ther mayor of ther hull burgh! Why, you Jim dandy, you! I have got a notion ter take ye across my knee, jest ter take some of ther consart out of ye."

The stranger smiled.

"I have come into your camp with the most peaceful intentions," he declared. "It would be much against my will and wish to engage in any sort of disturbance. Now I can't see that there is any use of our quarreling, sir. Let everybody step up and take poison at my expense, and call it square."

"That's one way ter get out of it," sneered Big-foot, while most of the crowd were much in favor of that plan, and many edged toward the bar at once.

"About the easiest way out of it," returned the stranger. "Come on, men, every one, and name your choice of terribles."

No need to urge that invitation, for there was a rush for places.

"Say, who in ther dickens be you?" the mayor demanded of the stranger.

"Want to know who I am, eh? Well, your question is a fair one. I am best known simply as Sparkler, the Sport."

"Sparkler, the Sport, hey? Waal, now, you is a sparkler, an' no foolin' erbout that; but you wants ter have a leetle more keer how yer opens yer trap when in good sassity. I am Reginald Brown, Mayor of Rough-an-Tumble."

CHAPTER IX.

A CLEAN KNOCK-DOWN.

AMONG the first to respond to the invitation had been the other new-comer, the dirty tramp who had called himself Lazy Lunk.

With a hasty jump he had been the first man at the bar, and leaning half-way over, had hoarsely whispered to the man in attendance, whom he had caught by the arm:

"Saay, be good, will yer? This is ther chance of a lifetime, yer knows. I do, if you don't. Give me a drink ther fu'st one, an' I'll slink out an' try an' work in fer a second round. See? Two sales fer you; two balls fer me."

"Git out!" was the response, as the barkeeper jerked away from him. "Move away, now, or I'll have you fired out. Ther stranger called up the men an' citizens, not tramps and bums. Get out, or I'll climb you. You won't get any of ther good stuff this round, an' don't think yer will."

"Ther merry I won't! You jest hand down yer p'izen, or thar will be somethin' droppin' on your side of ther plank. Say, d'ye hear? I'm inter this hyar thing, or I'll know the reason why. What d'ye think, galoots? Hyar ther p'izen-dispenser won't give me my dose. Bet yer life if I don't git it thar will be a circus hyar, an' one that will amaze ye."

"Hello! What is the trouble with you?" demanded the Sparkler, as, having pacified the mayor for the time, he gave attention to this altercation.

"Why, this hyar dirty bum put hisself up hyar on your treat, sir," was the ready explanation of the bartender. "I tell bim ther call wasn't fer his sort, an' I'll fire him out if he don't slide, you bet!"

"Oh, no; let him have what he wants," the generous Sport, ordered. "This treat is for the whole house, and I will pay my footing in your camp. Take what you desire, my good fellow, and if it don't kill you at once it will by and by. Give him his dose with the rest."

The bartender growled something about it's being "darn foolishness" but no "funeral of his," and Lazy Lunk was allowed to "poison" with the rest of the crowd.

"Bet yer life thar'd been a time hyar if I hadn't got et," he declared, as he wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "You're a white man, stranger, from ther top of yer hat to ther bottom of yer boots, an' I love yer."

"That's all right, my friend. You have had your medicine, so make room for some one else."

"All right: but, my! ain't that 'ar a sparkler, though!"

He was reaching out with thumb and finger, to take hold of the big diamond on the Sparkler's bosom, where his dirty touch would have left its mark, when the sport suddenly grabbed his wrist and checked him.

"Hands off!" he cried. "You may look, but you mustn't touch, my friend. I don't want my shirt frescoed with dirt, if you please."

"You is darn 'fraid o' yer linen," sneered the bummer. "I wouldn't tetch it; I was only goin' ter feel of yer d'ming."

"Well, you needn't touch that, either. You would dim it so it wouldn't be worth a dollar."

"What is ther dirty cuss tryin' ter do?" demanded Brown, edging up.

"Oh, nothin'; only wanted to finger my stud, and I objected."

"Ther darn galoot! I'll finger him, by mighty I will! Come to yer uncle, ye ragged bum, till I dust ye out a leetle."

He made a reach for the fellow but did not get hold of him, for the bummer had made a hasty retreat out of the way, muttering something about the mayor being the law and the necessity of obeying.

"I don't wonder he wanted ter handle it,

though," Big-foot observed as he turned again to the Sport, "fer it are a beauty, an' no mistake. Wouldn't mind ownin' one like it myself—"

But, just there he was interrupted in a surprising way. Like Lazy Lunk, he had reached out a thumb and finger to take hold of it, when the Sport caught hold of his wrist. And the mayor was so amazed that he stopped short with mouth agape.

"You can see it without handling it, sir," the Sport remarked, pleasantly. "That was just the mistake the other fellow made. You must keep your hands off."

The mayor was too amazed to speak, at first. To think that any one would dare to interfere with him in this way! And right in public, too! It would never do to let it go at that. Why, it was being used just the same as the dirty bumper had been!

He did not take into consideration that there was little difference in his favor between himself and the bumper.

"Why, ye durn ape!" he cried, "do ye mean ter say that I can't tetch it? I reckon I will, then, jest ter show ye who is boss 'round hyar."

He reached out again, with thumb and finger, and this time his hand was knocked away without any regard for his feelings, either physical or sentimental. There was likely to be fun.

"You may be boss of the camp," the stranger coolly remarked, "but you don't want to make the great mistake of trying to play the boss over me and my personal property. When you undertake that, you are going too far."

"Hungry hyenas! Do yer mean ter say thet my fingers is dirty, like ther other bum's over thar? Do yer mean ter put me on a level w' him? Darn me if I don't take that hat off yer head and make a spittoon of it. Why, you dandy snipper of a galoot, I could take ye in one hand an' pinch ye in two!"

"Better go slow, Mister Brown. If you make me do it, I will stand you on your head about as quick as you can think about it, and I'm not blowing, either."

"It sounds like it, if yer ain't. Now, me galus duck, I set out ter feel o' that 'ar di'ming, ter see if it's hot, an' I'm goin' ter do it. If you hold right still thar won't be no trouble."

"Try it on, that's all. 'This is of your own making, this trouble, and you may get enouzh of it, if you keep on. Now you have been fairly warned, and if you want to go ahead, do it. But go slow!"

A fierce, dangerous expression was appearing in the stranger's eyes and upon his face.

Perhaps the mayor saw it, but it would never do for him to draw back now. He had pushed the matter, and must carry it through, and as he was "boss" of the camp, and the best man of them all, it was not likely he could be bettered by this fellow.

With his right fist ready for action, the mayor reached out again, with the left hand, certainly meaning to finger the stone.

The whole crowd was looking on, breathless. Even those who had not yet been "poisoned" refrained from tasting till they saw the end of the wrangle. And all felt some pity for the dandy stranger.

"Yer had better not be too p'tic'lar," cautioned one, "but had better let ther mayor have his feel. That will settle it."

"I'll let him feel my fist, if he touches it," the Sport assured. "He has no business to touch the diamond, and I won't let him or any other man do it. That's the sort of a bantam Sparkler the Sport is."

But Big-foot reached out notwithstanding, and laid a finger on the flashing stone.

The instant he did so the Sport's left hand came from somewhere with terrific force, taking him under the ear and lifting him almost off his feet, dropping him like a log on the floor.

For some seconds it was thought the mayor had been killed, but, presently, a sigh was heard, and he began to move.

This was something the crowd had never seen before—Big-foot on his back.

"He would have it," quietly remarked the Sparkler, "and now I expect he will want more. Very well, I guess I can accommodate him without putting a wrinkle in my coat."

Brown was now supporting himself on one elbow, looking around foolishly.

"Show me ther cuss what done it," he demanded, faintly. "Show me ther coward what chipped in and hit me when I wasn't lookin'. I said yer was a coward, Dandy, an' so ye be, ter let a pard do a trick like that."

"My pard was my own fist," the sport answered.

"Wh—wh—what?" the fellow gasped.

The crowd assured the mayor that such was the fact, but it was hard to make him believe it, unless he was pretending, as probably he was.

"If that's ther fack," he said, getting up, "I don't want no proof of it of ther same sort. You is ther fu'st man what ever laid me on me back, an' hyar's me hand. We'll be friends, fer I ain't fool enough ter want ter have ye as a enemy; nary."

He gave his hand; it was taken, and so, to the surprise of all, it ended.

CHAPTER X.

MUNSON KILGORE'S SCHEME.

WHILE this scene was being enacted, another was transpiring that is worthy of some attention.

It was in the parlor of the Montrose cottage, where Gulnare Montrose and Munson Kilgore were engaged in conversation.

"Yes," we find the young lady saying, "papa has engaged a new superintendent in poor Hamilton's place. I have not seen him yet, but his name is Reuben Randal. I suppose you have seen him."

"Yes: I have seen the gentleman. He is good-looking—perhaps you will agree with me, but of rather forbidding countenance, as I think. He wears full beard, and does not look to be over thirty. Wears his beard close-trimmed, and it becomes him well."

"You seem to have observed him closely."

"I have. There is naturally some interest in the man who is to take poor Hamilton's place."

"I suppose so. Indeed there must be. Isn't it strange that nothing can be heard of Mr. Hamilton? But, we have agreed upon that a hundred times."

"And still it is never old. Yes; it is more than strange. Do you still hold to your theory that it must have been foul play? What ever brought that idea to you with such force?"

"I do not know. It came of itself, and nothing can change it. Yes, I still hold to it, and nothing can drive it out, unless it is proof to the contrary. Oh, Mr. Kilgore, can't you and the others do something to solve the awful mystery?"

"You know how gladly I would do so if I could."

"I believe you. You are more generous in the matter than I could suppose you would be."

"Yes; I would restore Valentine Hamilton, or would solve the mystery concerning him, were it possible, even though by doing so I were to banish the last hope of a cherished desire."

The villain spoke with impassioned accent, and the maiden bent her eyes to the floor.

"Are you in earnest in what you say?" she asked.

"Try me," was the cry. "Show me anything that has been undone, toward bringing a solution to this problem, and see how I will go at work."

"Would that I were able to suggest something, but it seems that everything has been done. It was foul play, Mr. Kilgore, I know it was. Somebody would have seen or heard of him by this time, had it not been."

"It would seem so; but, on the other hand, if he went away secretly, with the desire to be missing in just this way, he would take care not to let his identity be known to any one."

"I suppose so; but Mr. Hamilton was not that kind. He was too open, too honest, to play such a mean role. No, no; I will not believe that of him. It was foul play, and if the truth is ever learned you will see that I was right."

"I honestly hope not, anyhow. I wouldn't want it to prove anything so terrible. But, Miss Montrose, may I at this time ask a serious question?"

"Oh, no—no; not now, not now!" the young lady hastily demurred.

"Perhaps you misjudge what it is I have in mind," looking forward eagerly and speaking earnestly.

"I do not know, but better not ask me anything now. Wait, wait until some other time, Mr. Kilgore."

"It is not the question I have asked before, Gulnare—Miss Montrose. It is something else."

"Not the question to which I gave you such a decided answer in the negative? If it is not that, then you may speak."

"No, it is not that, but it is almost as important to me. It is a serious question. It is this: were you engaged to Hamilton?"

"I was not," was the quiet answer.

"That is all. I will not ask anything further, for I know you regarded him with much esteem, at least. Still, I am glad there was no engagement, for it gives me more hope for a desire

which I will not mention now. You will pardon my speaking thus plainly, but you know what my regard for you is."

"I understand."

"But I am none the less ready to put forth my every effort to solve this riddle concerning Hamilton, and to bring him back, if that is possible. Gulnare, I love you, but that love is not selfish. It is a love that seeks only your greatest happiness, and if that happiness be—"

"Say no more, Mr. Kilgore, please say no more, I believe I have been judging you wrongly. I never believed you capable of such generous impulse—to call it that. I believe I have never understood you aright."

"I hope such is the case, Gulnare. And if I dared, I might at this moment put just one other question. Will you permit it? Yes, I will. It is nearly similar to the one I asked you some time ago, and which you answered with such force. Should Mr. Hamilton not reappear in—say three months, will you then allow me to ask that important question again?"

Tears came into the beautiful eyes once more—for they had already once appeared, and she allowed him to take her hand.

"Yes; at the end of that time you may ask me again," she gave permission.

"Thank you—thank you!" he exclaimed, raising the hand and pressing the fingers for an instant to his lips. "You have given me hope—something to live for."

"But in the mean time—"

She did not finish what had come to mind.

"In the mean time," Kilgore took it up, "I shall make every effort to find the missing man. If he comes back, and satisfactorily explains his absence, then I am willing to leave you free to choose between us, and abide by your decision."

"I have greatly misjudged you," the girl muttered in undertone, "I have greatly misunderstood you, Mr. Kilgore."

Steps were heard on the stoop without, their conversation abruptly ended, and they drew a little apart.

From what has been set forth, it can be seen that Miss Montrose was a person of impulse, and one not hard to deceive. Perfectly honest in intent, she had all too little force of will to cope with such intriguants and conspirators as this man Kilgore.

Following the sound of steps, the door opened, and voices were heard in the hall.

One was that of Mr. Montrose, the other, one that Gulnare had never heard before. She glanced at Kilgore with a questioning look.

"I believe it is Mr. Randal," Kilgore said.

The door opened, and Mr. Montrose came in, followed by the new superintendent.

Introductions followed, and Kilgore saw, or fancied he saw, that Miss Montrose looked upon the stranger with something of admiration.

A dark look settled upon his face, for a moment, and one which caused Randal to give him a second glance. But, it was soon gone, and the little company fell into conversation.

Mr. Montrose's short acquaintance with his new superintendent had satisfied him that he was what he had seemed—a gentleman, and one worthy of his confidence, and wanting to have some conversation with him that evening, he had sought Randal out at the so-called hotel, afterward inviting him to the house.

"You want to get acquainted here," the manager said, after introductions, "and I recommend Kilgore to you in all confidence as just the person to put you on good footing with everybody. He can do it better than I could myself, as he has dealings with everybody in the camp, and is obliged to be on good terms with the rougher class, whether he would or not."

"Then I shall have to put myself under your wing for an evening, Mr. Kilgore, some time soon, and take a survey of the place."

"It will give me pleasure to make you acquainted," was the response. "I am obliged to be on good terms with all, much as I detest an occasional visit to the rough places of our rough camp. We will go around together as soon as you may desire. I suppose it is time I showed myself among the roughs, and company will be welcome."

"The sooner the better, I should think," remarked Montrose. "Get the good-will of the rough class, Randal, before they have had time to give you their ill."

The conversation finally came around to the subject of the missing man.

Nothing new could be said. Miss Montrose stuck to her opinion as firmly as ever, and her father and Kilgore held to theirs. That of Randal was not decided.

Finally, the two young men left the house in company, and made their way toward the center

of the camp, where the evening carousal was about at its height. And as they proceeded, Randal continued to talk about the missing man.

CHAPTER XI. DIFFERING OPINIONS.

"THAT seems to be a strikingly queer case," Randal remarked.

"Yes, it certainly is all of that," Kilgore agreed. "Strangest I ever met with in my experience."

"Perhaps you have some ideas regarding it which you would not express in the presence of the lady. You may know much more about the young man than she, or even her father."

"I understand what you are hinting at," was the response, "but it is just that that is the mighty queer part of it. There was nothing crooked about Hamilton, so far as any one knows. He was one of the best fellows you ever saw."

"That is strange. Of course that is what Mr. Montrose said of him, but I thought a younger man might know more about the matter. A general idea was in my mind that perhaps there was another woman in the case, as it sometimes happens. Now that you support their opinion, I am inclined to agree with the young lady in her view."

"That it must have been foul play?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I can't agree with you, for the reason that suspicion can be pointed nowhere with effect; in fact, there is no suspicion against anybody. Hamilton hadn't a single enemy in the camp."

"So it seems, from all that has been said, but he may have had an enemy for all that."

"But I don't know where you would go to find him. He has been here over two years, and if he had an enemy who would do him injury in a bodily way, I should think he would have done it before."

"True enough; but his enemy may be one who has some recent grudge. This is all idle speculation, however. Let's drop it."

"I'm willing, though I hate to drop it, too. I wish I could clear it up, so as to have an end to it."

"And they tell me you have done some hard work trying to clear it up. You and Hamilton were friends, I take it."

"Oh, yes, we were friendly enough, but not intimate. Yes, I have tried all I know how to find out something about him, but haven't been able to get the slightest clew."

"It is certainly a strange case. Perhaps it will never be cleared up. A strange disappearance is a baffling thing, sometimes. There was—Hullo! what is the matter with that fellow?"

Well might he ask.

They had just passed the shanty occupied by the two washerwomen, and turned a corner, when they came face to face with Silly Bob.

Immediately that poor half-wit uttered a scream that was startling, turned about as quickly as possible, and away he went, as though a demon were after him, still screaming.

Manson Kilgore laughed.

"That is Silly Bob," he explained. "He is a poor fool who is more afraid of me than he could be of a rattlesnake, and without reason, too, for I never did anything to him to make him so."

"His scream was enough to startle any one. Where does he hang out?"

"At the laundry. He was there when the Chinamen had it, and he still hangs on with the women who run it now."

The story of that event—the change at the laundry, was told, and by that time they were at the saloon.

When they entered it was about the time when the mayor had made friends with Sparkler the Sport.

"Hello! an' hello!" sung out Big-foot, "if yer uncle's eyes don't fool him, hyar is more strangers. It never rains but it pours, by darn. Who is this hyar, Mun?" addressing Kilgore.

"This gentleman is Mr. Reuben Randal, the new superintendent of the Pay Dirt, and it gives me pleasure to introduce him. Mr. Randal, let me present you to Honorable Reginald Brown, Mayor of Rough-and-Tumble. Mr. Brown, you will find Mr. Randal a man of the right caliber, I think."

"Mr. Brown, I am glad to know you," Randal frankly declared, as he stepped forward, offering his hand.

"Ther new super, hey?" repeated the mayor, looking Randal over from top to toe, as he took his hand. "I'm glad ter know yer, lad, an' hope you'll pan as well as pore Hamilton did. He war white, c'lar to ther core."

Everywhere, so far, Randal had heard nothing but good words for the missing man whose place he occupied.

"I haven't any hope of filling his place as he filled it himself," was the response, "but hope to have the good will of all your citizens."

"Thar's a way ter git it," sung out one rough voice.

"And how is that?" the superintendent asked.

"Do ther same as ther Sparkler hev done."

"You will have to inform me who the Sparkler is, and what he has done," Randal said pleasantly.

"Ther Sparkler!" exclaimed Big-foot, wheeling with a flourish of the hand; thishyar is ther Sparkler. An' he is the best man what ever sot foot in Rough-an'-Tumble, too, an' don't ye fergit it."

Sparkler the Sport and Reuben Randal looked at each other keenly, as though there was a chance of recognition.

But it was only for the passing second, and the Sparkler extended his hand.

"I'll consider it as an introduction, if you are willing," he said.

"And I have no objection," was Randal's response.

Their hands met.

"And now," Randal questioned, "what thing is it you have done, that has insured your standing with the crowd?"

"Why, I have treated all around, that is all."

"Oh, that is it, eh? Well, men of Rough-and-Tumble, just rough and tumble yourselves up to the shelf and see if you can stand another dose of the same at my expense."

Before the invitation had half been uttered there was the crash of a chair overturned in haste, then another, and Lazy Lunk, the first stranger of the evening, was at the bar ready to indulge.

"Hyar is me!" he announced. "Give it to me, boss, 2nd give it to me quick! Man wants but leetle here below, but wants it good an' long an' plenty strong. Pass it over hyar, an' see how quick I kin gullup down a three-finger portion that 'll make smoke come out of my ears."

"Does your treat include this hyar galoot?" the bartender asked.

He called the attention of the new superintendent to the hard-looking fellow who was making the noise.

"Yes, it includes everybody who wants to run the risk," was the laughing answer.

"Does yer hear that?" cried the Lunk. "Trot it out, now, an' consider me as good as me neighbor. That's ther idee. Hyar's to ther rich an' ther poor alike, men of Rough-an'-Tumble; an' I've been both in my day."

He downed some of the fiery poison and turned away.

For the succeeding ten minutes the bartender was kept busy enough.

It is of no gilded palace saloon we write, but one of the roughest of the rough.

While this was going on, Randal was talking with the mayor, or rather listening to his talk, and Kilgore and the Sparkler were standing a little apart.

The latter was paying some passing attention to some notices which were on the wall, when suddenly his eyes fell upon one which seemed to have more than usual interest for him.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "what is this I see?"

"That's a reward offered for information concerning a missing man—"

"No, no; I don't mean that, but this other. Is Devil Duval wanted away up in this section, too?"

"Oh, you mean that one. That's stale. It has been there a good while, but I guess the man it calls for will never put in appearance here."

"Well, you may hope not, certainly. He is a terror, the little I know about him. I see that reward posted wherever I go. Pity they couldn't catch and hang the wretch."

"Yes, if all they say about him is true."

"And it is, unquestionably. They can't tell anything to his hurt."

"Of whom is that you speak?" asked Randal, who just then turned toward them, with the mayor.

"Oh, I don't believe half I hear about him," he declared, when he had been told. "A rough enough customer, no doubt, but who can believe such stories as are told of him? It is putting it on a little too strong, I think."

At that instant a surprising thing happened.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MESSAGE OF THE RIFLE.

FIRST of all there was a crash of glass at a window at the side of the room, near the rear. With the crash, many eyes were instantly

turned in that direction, to behold the muzzle of a rifle looking in, and before any could dodge there came the sharp crack peculiar to that weapon.

The report had followed the breaking of glass so closely that it was heard before half the persons in the room had had time to look in the direction of the window, and immediately the rifle disappeared from sight, having been seen by only a third of the crowd at the most.

"Whoop! Murthuration!"

So cried Barney O'Linn, who had been right near the window. And with the cry he sprung up and bounded out upon the floor.

"Sure is it dead or aloive Oi am?" he demanded. "'Pon me soul Oi do bel'ave dhe spalpeen thried to blow dhe head off me, so Oi do!"

"Who in ther mischief done thet 'ar?" cried Big-foot Brown, glaring around to see who was dead, expecting nothing less than to see a victim lying somewhere. "An' what in ther wuss'n mischief did he shoot at?"

At first nobody seemed to know, but presently there was a shout, and one in the crowd made a discovery.

"Hyar it are!" he cried.

Pushing forward, he pointed to the placard that published the reward for the outlaw, Devil Duval!

There, pinned through the placard and deeply imbedded in the wall was a rude barb, around which, secured with fine wire, was what appeared to be a piece of paper. Immediately all interest was centered upon it.

"That is it, sure enough," cried Sparkler the Sport. "I thought I heard the bullet strike this side of the house."

"So did I, an' I war lookin' ter find ther hole when I spotted this hyar thing."

"What can be the meaning of it?" questioned Reuben Randal.

"Jest what I wants ter know, an' jist what I'm goin' ter know, if it is ter be diskivered," and the mayor shouldered his way toward the spot where the barb was imbedded.

Way was made for him, and his grimy fist was soon around the barb, trying to pull it out.

"Has anybody gone out to see if the man who fired it can be seen?" asked the new superintendent of the Pay Dirt.

Not a person seemed to have thought of that. There was an immediate rush for the door, on the part of many, but none ventured to push too close to the window.

These were back again to report before the mayor had the thing out of the wall. No one was to be seen, they said. Whoever it was had fired the rifle, had made off and was not to be found.

"In course he has made tracks!" cried Big-foot, as he tugged at the rude arrow. "If I had ther cuss hyar I'd make him pull ther thing out wi' his teeth. By ther great calibers, I would!"

"Hold on, mayor," suggested Randal; "never mind the iron, but get the paper that's around it there. Maybe it says something."

"Why, darn it, in course!" agreed the mayor. "I never thort o' that. Why didn't yer speak afore ye spoke?"

In a few seconds he had the fine wire removed, and then from around the iron barb carefully unwound a half-sheet of paper.

"Hyar it be," he cried, looking at it, "an' thar's writin' on it, too! See what it says, Mister Sparkler, bein' as you are in ther best light."

He extended it to the Sport, who took it, held it up toward the light, and read it out aloud.

It was worded as follows:

"TO THE HEATHEN HORDE OF ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE:—"

"You are the worst set of cowardly ruffians out of jail and unhung. Your camp is the worst hole this side of the infernal. Still I won't quarrel with you if you will come to terms. Hunted everywhere, I want a hole to run to. If you will agree to let me make my headquarters at your camp when it gets too hot for me in the hills, let me know. It must be peace or war between us, and you may have just whichever you choose. Your answer in writing, posted alongside of this notice, will be enough. I shall see it. Don't let yourselves think that I am fooling; I mean business just either way you will have it. Name your choice of the two evils."

"Yours for peace or for war."

"DEVIL DUVAL, THE OUTLAW."

At the mention of that name there was a howl.

More faces than one grew a shade pale, and all looked to the mayor to see what he would have to say. His face was a picture of rage, and it had been changing color all during the reading of the missive the rude arrow had

brought. Now he broke out into a storm, fairly jumping up and down.

"Great calibers!" he screamed, "do yer mind what ther cuss hev called us? A heathen horde, be we! By ther ruins of ther ragin' rampage if we don't show him a thing or two, if he comes hyar! An' he wants ter ring us in wi' him, an' make his headquarters hyar—"

Force of words failing, he finished it out by jumping, stamping and brandishing his weapons.

"This certainly looks like business," observed the Sparkler.

"But, what brings him away up in this lone region?" questioned Randal.

"Seeking safety, I should say, judging by the tone of the note," responded the Sport.

"It must be that, for there is no very rich trail for him to collect toll on. But have you any idea that he means all he says?"

"I have heard enough of the fellow to believe anything of him. If his men are around here, then this will be a healthy place to move out of, that is all I have to say."

"And I never believed half I have heard of him, as I have said already," rejoined Randal. "If he is the desperate character he is said to be, there is likely to be a rousing time around here, I should say. But, I hardly believe anybody is going to run away; eh, mayor?"

"Waal, I ruther shout not!" cried Big-foot. "By ther gods o' war, if this hyar campever got a insult, it hev got it now! Citerzens, be we goin' ter stand anything of this hyar sort? Be we goin' ter be called heathen, an' never kick ergainst it? I jest rise up my Ebernezer an' scream NO! Hustle 'round, somebody, an' hunt up a piece o' paper, till I post ther cuss his answer."

Paper and pencil were finally forthcoming, and Big-foot spreading the paper out on the wall, proceeded to write.

It occupied him several minutes, and no one could tell just what manner of answer he was preparing, until it was done and he had posted it up. Then it was read by all who could read.

"Thar!" he cried. "Thar, devil, see how *that* sets on yer stummick. Jest gaze on it, if so be ye are hyer in ther room, an' see if it is strong enough ter suit yer taste. An' it ain't half as strong in ther letter as it be in ther sperret, not by er mighty ways."

His reply, printed out in crude letters and worse spelling, was in these words:

"DEVEL DUVUL THE OUTLAW:—

"Yeau cinn go tu yur namesaik! We doant cair fur yeau hair. If yeau cumm hair yeau will git an pizn doas, ann doant yeau fale tu mind that. Yeau cinn maik it war ann be darn tu yeau!

"Ann we meen bezniss.

"R. BROWN, MARE."

And as the mayor pointed to this, he glared around over the crowd, as though trying to pick out the man who might be the outlaw or one of his followers. But no one was seen upon whom suspicion could rest.

His rough attempt in the line literary caused Kilgore, Randal, the Sparkler and a few others to smile, but they all agreed with him that it was to the point, and that it could not fail of being understood. And they agreed, too, to back him up in the matter.

There was one person in the room, one in particular, who paid attention to everything, but who kept in the background himself.

And this was Barney O'Linn. After his excited exclamations, following the rifle-shot, he had subsided, and nothing more had been heard from him. Now he stood a little out of the center of the crowd.

It would have been hard to have picked out any particular individual who was to be suspected, for everybody's interest was awakened and at the highest pitch.

The hour that followed was an exciting one. The matter was discussed from every point of view possible.

It ended as it had begun, without anything more definite than the threats of the mayor. And finally the excitement died away, to a degree, and at last the crowd broke up.

The evening had not been without some results, whether for good or evil. The new superintendent had found favor with the majority caste of the camp's denizens, and there had grown up, seemingly, a degree of good-fellowship among him, Munson Kilgore, Sparkler the Sport, and one or two others.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE ENDING.

TWO weeks went by, after the events last recorded, and in all that time there was no excitement worthy of more than passing mention, if deserving of that.

Not another word or sign had come from the outlaw, with whom trouble had been looked for immediately, after the message he had delivered in so striking a manner. It was the mayor's boast that his prompt answer must have frightened him off.

But there were plenty who scouted at that idea. If Devil Duval was the man he was reputed to be, or anything near such a desperate character, nothing was likely to daunt him. It must be that something had happened to make him alter his plans to suit circumstances.

However, be that as it might, Rough-and-Tumble rather congratulated herself that she had escaped a visitation so easily. Inquiry concerning the outlaw, since his mysterious visit, had brought out many of his desperate deeds, and none in the camp wanted him to come there, bluster and brag as they might. He was liked the better a long ways off.

A fiend who could coolly cut off a victim's head, as it was reported he had done, or who could tie a victim up against the side of a cabin, and kill him by the slow torture of firing forty or more bullets into his body before he allowed one to reach a vital spot, was one whose company was not to be desired. In truth, there were even worse crimes than that laid to the charge of Devil Duv 1; and we who know something about the arch scoundrel, know that in all probability the worst that was said of him was true.

All was quiet about the camp, unusually quiet, but it was only the calm that preceded a storm. The two women who had taken the places of the Chinamen in the laundry were doing a thriving business. They were busy early and late, and it was evident that they were making money. Silly Bob was with them.

Among their best customers were Sparkler the Sport and the new superintendent of the Pay Dirt. Each of these gentlemen donned a fresh "b'iled" every morning, and occasionally oftener, if one chanced to get soiled, and their calls at the laundry were frequent, in consequence. And their washing was profitable, since "b'iled shirts were an expensive luxury.

In all this time nothing had been heard of the missing man. It was now considered a long chance that he would ever be heard of again.

Reuben Randal was an occasional caller at the Montrose cottage, but his attentions to the fair Gulnare were nothing more than civil, polite and agreeable. So far as he was concerned, Munson Kilgore had no occasion to fear rivalry, if appearances went for aught.

In another direction, however, Kilgore had good cause to feel the sting of jealousy. Sparkler, the Sport, had made himself intimate with Mr. Montrose, had gained the entree to his fire-side circle, and there was no disguising the truth that Gulnare was looking upon him with more than ordinary interest. And Kilgore was not unaware of it, either.

Barney O'Linn was still in the camp, with no other purpose in view, seemingly, than to get the most enjoyment out of the passing hour. In mentioning him it becomes necessary to introduce a character who, thus far, has not found mention in our romance.

This personage is one Jean Timball, a fellow who had appeared at the camp a short time before the coming of the two women, and who at first had seemed to have no end or purpose in view. He had hired a shanty, set up housekeeping on his own hook, and minded his own business. Later on he had sought employ at the Pay Dirt, and had been taken on as a laborer.

This Jean Timball was a man of thirty or thereabouts, fairly good-looking as men go, and wearing a full beard that was, in appearance, running to seed, as it was beginning to look in need of the scissors. With this man, somehow, Barney O'Linn had struck up an acquaintance that had ripened into friendship, and now they were sharing the same shanty. There was nothing peculiar about this, since every shanty had from two to ten inmates, men who clubbed together for mutual good.

Reuben Randal, the new superintendent, had proven himself to be the man for the post he held. He had the good will of all the men under him, and that was a strong point. He had made few intimate friends, however; Mr. Montrose and Munson Kilgore seeming to be the only ones. The men under him were treated fairly, and without fear or favor. And he had had no trouble save on one occasion, when one big, burly fellow had refused to obey some reasonable order.

This was a fellow who was always trying to make trouble in some way or other, in the camp and who had ranked scarcely second to Big-foot Brown as a town bully. On that occasion Randal had repeated the order, and the men were all pausing in their work to see how it would come out. It was, in fact, the test of the new superintendent's "caliber." The third time Randal gave the order, and this time with the threat of immediate discharge if it was not promptly obeyed. The bully laughed at that and uttered some bragging boast, when, to the surprise of all, Randal caught hold of him and pitched him out of the drift as easily as though he had been a boy of ten.

That was the only occasion of difficulty of that sort. The bully came back, shamefaced and cringing, owning that he was no match for the "super," and asking leave to go to work again. He was given his place, when he went to work with a will, and was now one of Randal's strongest backers. And the man Timball, whether Randal noticed it or not, had looked upon this little "scrap" with evidently the keenest satisfaction, and his admiration for the "super" seemed to increase from that moment. Later, he told Barney about it with much evident relish, as the best thing he had seen in a dog's age.

"Lazy Lunk," another who has found place in the preceding pages, was still in the camp, as indolent as ever, and as ready to imbibe "poison." Who he was, never troubled anybody; it was plain to be seen *what* he was.

Of course the two women at the laundry had long since discovered the antipathy Silly Bob had to Munson Kilgore. The Widow Lamb had questioned him about it, but Bob could not yet be induced to tell anything. He had, after much urging on one occasion, muttered something about fearing Kilgore would kill him, but that was all the women had been able to get, much as their curiosity was aroused.

One afternoon Kilgore entered the shanty at a time when Bob was behind the rude counter helping the women about their work, and there was no way of escape open to him. He turned deathly pale, and sunk down behind the counter, weak and trembling.

Kilgore laughed heartily, and demanded to know what was the matter with the women's brave protector.

"He is afraid of you, that seems to be all," answered the Widow Lamb.

"And deathly afraid of me, too, I should say," was the return. "Come out here, Bob; I won't harm you."

But the silly fellow came not. He merely groaned, and tried to get out of sight completely. That his fear was genuine was not to be questioned.

"I can't see why he should fear me so," observed Kilgore.

"He says he is afraid you will kill him," the Widow Lamb remarked.

At that, Bob gave a louder groan, and when they looked he had stretched out and was twitching and jerking in a genuine fit.

Kilgore looked puzzled, even alarmed, and made his stay as short as he could.

When the women had succeeded in bringing Bob out of his fit, the poor fellow was as limp as a rag, and on opening his eyes, in a weak, half-screaming way, he cried:

"Over the ledge! Over the ledge! Poor Hamilton, poor Hamilton! Silly Bob know all—"

There he stopped, with a gasp, realizing that he was overheard, and sunk back upon the floor completely used up.

The two women looked at each other in a suggestive way, and from that moment their kindness to Silly Bob increased, if possible. Their main aim seemed to be to win his confidence.

After that, for some reason or other, Reuben Randal began to make advances in a kindly way toward the youth, and not only he, but Barney O'Linn, and even Jean Timball. Did Munson Kilgore but know it, the beginning of the end had been marked for him, and the mystery of Valentine Hamilton was ere long to be cleared up!

CHAPTER XIV.

AN AMAZING SPECTACLE.

ONE night later on, at a late hour, two men met at a little distance out of Rough-and-Tumble.

After an exchange of words they clasped hands.

"Well, Right Bower, what is the word?" asked one.

"Little of nothin', and nothin' of somethin'," was the answer. "Reckon they have give up hopes of seein' Devil Duval."

"It looks that way," was the half-amused

rejoinder, "but they may hear of me again in some way or other. That was a clever dodge, Owen."

"That's what it was, Morgan—yer see I have to call you by yer right handle once in a while, to keep my mind fixed on who you really be. It has made 'em all look upon Devil Duval as a terrible somethin' a good ways off."

"Ha, ha, ha!" in a low, sinister laugh that was unmistakably that of the arch demon named. "They may find him a good deal nearer than they want to, if anything happens to make me show my teeth. By the way, you are playing your part to perfection. I believe we are going to down Dick Darrel this time."

"That's what we will, if nothin' bu'sts. But, talk about my playin', Morgan; yours is jest immense! Nobody could ever suspect you of bein' Devil Duval. It is the best game we have tried yet, and there isn't a chance of fail, that I can see. But, how about it? Have you got Darrel dead to rights yet? It's the cussedest queer thing I ever seen, how he kin fool us so long."

"Your talk is like that of a regular tough, Owen," commented Morgan. "You are spoiling your language. But, all the better for this once. I don't see how there can be any doubt about the thing, as we agreed before, do you?"

"That this Jean Timball is Dick Darrel?"

"Exactly."

"No; but what puzzles me is, how he kin rig himself up so cussed well that we can't be sure of him."

"He is smart, Owen, and it will take all our skill and nerve to beat him, or even to fight him off. If we get into his power once more, we are gone up."

"I believe that. But, about his smartness, I don't consider he's any better off in that line than you. I'd like ter see him tumble to who you are, and you have met him a dozen times a day ever since we have been here."

"Well, it is a game of devil against Satan, you know."

"That's so. And about the woman?"

"She isn't here. If that one at the laundry hadn't a pard with her, I might suspect her; but, it's useless. They're both just what they seem. See how they toil from morning to night. Mary Warne would never do that. Curse it, it baffles me. If she is here, she is disguised as a man, and you can depend on it."

"But, what good is it doing them? They can't tumble to us."

"So I think, now, and I think it's time for us to take the matter up and wipe them out."

"That's what we must do. I have had a chance to kill that Irishman a dozen times, and never get found out. He is a daring devil, to take the risk he does in this hole."

"Never fear but he knows what he is doing. But, I have something to propose to you. I have noticed that he and his pard Timball are in the habit of holding a sort of secret chat almost every evening near an old shanty half-way to the mine. You must hide there and hear what they have to say."

"Just ther thing! I'll make it my business to be in that old shanty every evenin' fer a week. If thar's a clew, you bet I'm willin' to work for it."

"And I think there may be. We have tried listening at their own shanty, but the little we have heard don't amount to anything. We must have proof that this man is Dick Darrel, and then do away with him."

"And if we can't git the proof, then do away with the pair of them, anyhow, on suspicion. It wouldn't do any harm, that I can see, and we know it would strike the right man in the Irishman. If right, all well; if wrong, no harm. One man more or less in the world don't count."

"Yes; and that is all right so far as it goes, but the man we want and must have is Dandy Dick Darrel. I want you to find out to a certainty if we have got him dead to rights in this man Timball."

"Don't we both agree to that? Isn't it plain enough? You couldn't separate Dick and his Irishman, not with a thorny club."

"But it looks so unlikely that they would come here together, and live so open, when the Irishman is a dead give-away."

"Mebby that's jest their game. But, rest easy, and I'll soon know the truth, if they are in the habit of meeting as you say. I hadn't noticed it. I'll lay for them."

"Yes; and get at the truth of it. This tame life is killing me. Let us once do away with Dick Darrel and the woolly West won't hold us, for we'll carry things with a high hand. Dandy is the only mortal I ever feared, and— Good heavens! what is all that about?"

There had come a sudden interruption. From

the direction of the camp came the sharp shrieks of a woman's voice.

Looking, they saw nothing at first, but the screaming continued at intervals of a second or two, and voices began to be heard here and there, as men rushed out to learn the cause.

"We must part and get away," spoke the outlaw chief.

"Yes, an' let's slide at once," agreed his Bowler. "Meet you again to-morrow night, same hour."

But at that instant their attention was arrested by something else—something more startling than the screaming.

Above the camp, in the foggy darkness, suddenly appeared a rosy light, and an excited hum of voices followed, showing that it was seen in the camp.

"Then, in the midst of the rosy halo, came a vision that, for the instant, seemed to chill the blood in the veins of the two scoundrels who gazed upon it from the distance. A woman, hanging by her neck from the limb of a tree on a jagged plateau—a scene they both recognized instantly as only too real.

"It's the ghost of that woman!" excitedly ejaculated Owen Maron.

"Ghost the devil!" retorted Duval. "There's no such thing. It's a trick, and one of Darrel's playing, too!"

"It must be a ghost," urged Maron. "How could anybody know anything about it? And how could Darrel do such a trick? It is a ghost, Morgan."

"I half believe it must be something supernatural. See how cussed real it is! It's the same spot, the same sight we saw when we left the thing swinging there— But, hark!"

The woman's voice again, in a wild, weird scream!

"Look! Look!" was the unearthly cry. "Look upon the work of Devil Duval! See how he served a woman who loved him too well! He hanged her—hanged her! To-night her rotting body sways in the winds at Indian Plateau, on the Old Pass. See the work of that devil's hand!"

"Curse it! we must part and get out of this," cried Duval.

"Right!" agreed Maron. "Here I go."

Away he did go, running, while Craig Morgan moved off in the darkness in another direction.

"Look! Look! Look!" came the woman's voice once more. "Devil Duval is in your midst, citizens of Rough-and-Tumble, and the blood of this murdered woman cries to you for vengeance! Are you men? Rise, hunt him down, and repay what is his due—the worst death that you can invent for him. See to it that he does not escape your hands. Dick Darrel, if you are here, avenge this wrong as you avenge your own!"

That was all. The light faded rapidly, and the darkness was the more intense for its having been there.

The citizens of the camp, half of whom were upon the street by this time, gazed in speechless amazement at the place where the wonderful vision had appeared, and where now was nothing but inky blackness. What did it mean?

CHAPTER XV.

VOICES OF THE NIGHT.

THE first man to break the stillness was Big-foot Brown.

Suddenly he began to shout and whoop with all the power of his strong lungs, calling upon the denizens of the place to hustle themselves out, and also calling for a prophet who might explain the strange sight that had been witnessed.

The spell broken, the whole crowd made the night hideous with their wild whoopings. Gradually lights were brought, from one way and another, and the square in front of the saloon and hotel was lighted up so that a man might recognize his neighbor.

"What seems to be the trouble here, mayor?" inquired Sparkler, the Sport, who soon appeared, buttoning his coat and vest.

"Great fightin' calibers!" the mayor screamed. "What don't seem ter be ther matter? Didn't yer see ther cussed thing?"

"No; what was it? I hear the men talking ghost, but surely you don't take stock in that sort of thing, do you?" What was it like, anyhow?"

"Seein' is believin', by darn!" asserted Big-foot. "If it wasn't a ghost we seen, then I'd like ter know what it was, that's all. Thar hanged a woman, right up thar in ther black fog an' clouds."

"A woman—a woman hanging there!"

The crowd affirmed the mayor's statement of it.

"Thar she hanged, I tell yer," the mayor insisted, "an' right out of ther black up thar comed ther most awfulest voice you ever heerd. If it wasn't a ghost, I want ter heer somebody tell what it war."

At the time of the appearing of the wonderful apparition, as said, the hour was very late, and only those who had been up and those who had been among the first to get up, upon hearing the woman's screams, had witnessed it, but they were in sufficient number to support the story.

Men kept coming, until the whole camp was out, or nearly so, and at the front were the mayor, Sparkler, Kilgore, Barney O'Linn and others.

"Begob, maybe it is dhe banshee it was," Barney suggested.

"If it was, it's death to Devil Duval it was chantin'," cried one fellow.

The story was soon told so that the latest arrivals upon the scene had as much knowledge of it as the first who had come, and it only remained to discuss it at length.

Needless to say that was done, fully. Nothing like it had ever been witnessed by any one there, and it furnished much food for comment.

"An' the voice said it was ther work of Devil Duval," the mayor summed up, "an' called on us ter avenge the crime. Be we men? Wull, I should howl that we am, an' if that Devil Duval is in our camp, by the great calibers he has got ter be hunted out an' strung up. Then's what I'm howlin', an' it's me what howls it."

"An' sarve dhe spalpeen roight," cried Barney O'Linn. "But sure it is dhat dhe cuss isn't here, or it is mesel' would [know him, so Oi would."

Barney had made no secret that he had had dealings with the outlaw as the follower of Dandy Dick. But it was understood that he was out of the hunt now, and had no further knowledge of the affair between Darrel and the outlaw.

However, he had not told Dandy Dick's story; merely giving a superficial account of what had taken place on one or two occasions.

"But," reminded the mayor, "ther voice hinted that Dandy Dick Darrel must be hyar in ther camp. If he be, let him come forth, an' by ther calibers we'll back him to a man an' hunt ther devil down."

"There is one way to settle the question of the truth of the story," spoke up Munson Kilgore.

"An' how are that?" demanded the mayor.

"By sending to see if a woman's body really does hang at Indian Plateau."

"That's so; but it is a darn long ways ter send, an' it can't do ther woman no good anyhow."

"I would say try to get hold of the outlaw first," suggested Sparkler, the Sport. "That would be the right beginning, and the man who takes him will reap a handsome reward, you know."

"That's so, too; but, how is a feller ter know ther cuss?" demanded Big-foot.

"That is more than I can tell you," the Sport responded.

While they were discussing this point, suddenly, from the direction of the south side of the pocket, came a loud, defiant laugh.

"Ha! ha! ha!" it pealed and echoed. And then followed the words: "Devil Duval defies you! You can never take me! Rough-and-Tumble is at my mercy! You refused to be friends with me; look out for my stug. When I strike, there will be nothing left of your place. And for Dick Darrel—death!"

The crowd listened in amazement. And, before any could speak, out of the north came another wild laugh, followed by a retort.

"Ha! ha! ha!" came the peal. "Your time is short, Devil Duval! Laugh while you may, for I am tireless upon your track. Dandy Dick Darrel fears you not, and ere long will claim your life's blood in atonement for the crimes you have done. This camp is not at your mercy; it defies you! Dare to show yours! If, openly, and it will be your death and not mine."

The crowd listened in speechless awe.

Was it true, then, that both the outlaw and his tireless Nemesis were within the camp at that moment?

The men looked from one to another, questioning, and many stopped to note just who were there and who was missing from the circle. There threatened to be a "rousing time" indeed.

"That's ther talk!" shouted the mayor, as soon as he had recovered from his surprise.

"That's ther sentymints of this hyar camp, right to a dot! You jest show yer nose hyar, Mister Devil, an' if thar won't be one less in ther sulphurous clime—or one more sent thar, then I miss my guess. You come hyer, an' see if thar won't be a time sich as will make yer back hair curl."

A pause, a silent wait, but neither of the voices had more to say, and that thought came to the mayor to send out men to find the persons who had spoken.

Many were ready and willing to go in search of Dick Darrel, but none were really willing to set forth to find the outlaw, in which direction danger and death seemed to lie.

But the search revealed nothing. No person was found in either direction, and the mystery of the voices of the night was not cleared. Gradually the excitement died out, the crowd melted away, and finally the camp was once more in repose.

Next morning, in the minds of nearly all, it seemed like a dream. There was nothing to show that it had been, and certainly nothing to explain the wondrous vision that had appeared in the inky clouds. The sun was bright, the fog and clouds having cleared, and it seemed impossible that anything of the kind had been seen at all.

There were some who even questioned whether or not it had not been the effect of a too-prolonged stay at the Swill-tub that had caused it. But there were too many witnesses for that theory to gain footing. No, mysterious as it was, the picture in the fog, together with the voices of the night, had been real enough. That was not to be questioned for a moment. But, the mystery of it all. How the picture?—or had it been a ghost, indeed?

And then, too, Dandy Dick and Devil Duval—who were they? Where were they keeping themselves? What was going to come of it all? Questions no one could answer. But everybody, from the greatest even unto the least of them, and that ran the entire gamut between Big-foot Brown and Mungo Montrose—had a prescience that something was coming; that there was going to be a rousing time at Rough-and-Tumble before the matter was finally settled for good and all.

But for a day or two there was no sign of it.

Everything went on as before, and there was no excitement greater than an occasional fight at the Swill-tub, among rough customers who had imbibed too freely of the "swill."

But, under the surface, there was a swift current that was rushing on with a burden of thrilling events that were soon to boil to the surface and bubble over, to the intense excitement of the camp as a whole. And what had been seen and heard so far, were but mere shadows cast before.

There came about this time a break between Munson Kilgore and Sparkler, the Sport.

Kilgore, unable to bear longer his attentions to Gulnare Montrose, had taken him to task about it, and not wisely in private, as he should have done, but on the street where there were witnesses.

The Sport regarded the matter coolly, and demanded to know what claim he, Kilgore, had upon the lady. Was he her husband? Was he even her accepted suitor? If not, then he, the Sport, could not give way to him in the matter, so long as his presence was not displeasing to the lady—and he had no reason to think it was.

Hot words followed, hot on the part of Kilgore, and there were threats, at which the Sport merely smiled. They had not spoken since.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HANDS UP, DICK DARREL!"

ON the two evenings since the night of the mysterious ghostly appearance in the clouds, a certain personage who has been well introduced in the foregoing chapters concealed himself in a deserted and half ruined shanty about half-way between the center of the camp and the office of the mine.

We know for what purpose he was there, and on the second evening of his vigil he was rewarded. Barney O'Linn and his "pard" Timball sauntered out that way, and finally stopped right near the shanty to talk. They were in earnest conversation, and while not speaking loudly, their tones were plainly audible to the man in hiding in the shanty.

But it was a conversation of Greek and Latin—or might as well have been, for all the eaves-dropper could make of its meaning.

The words he could understand, but not so the meaning. It did not seem that there could be any meaning to it.

But there came something pretty soon that he could understand, and something that interested him greatly.

"But, Dick," Barney started to say, when the other stopped him.

It was the name that arrested the keener attention of the listener. It was a name he had wanted to hear.

"Why will you call me Dick?" Timball asked. "My name is Jean, and nothing else."

"Sure it is a name that will slip out in spoite av me," Barney declared.

"Well, you don't want to let it slip out," the other admonished. "Call me by my name, and nothing else."

"Sure Oi will; but don't be afther gettin' mad wid me about it."

"Oh, I am not mad. Merely wanted to correct you and set you right. Now, go on with what you were going to say."

"But, Jean," Barney went back and began anew, "mice an' swallows don't both have wings, ye sure must know. An' dhere's no legs on a snake, no more dhere is. Dhat is moonshine when it's rainin'."

"Yes, I know, Barney; but you will admit that there is hair on a dog's back, and that a whale don't do so well out of water as it does in it. And if it comes to that, did you ever see a swallow that didn't have wings? I never did, I'm sure."

A fair sample of the meaningless talk the listener had been taking in for a full quarter of an hour, and it continued for some minutes longer.

Finally the two went off in the direction of the camp, and after awhile, when it was growing dark, the eavesdropper came forth from his place of hiding and moved away in another direction.

"I'd like to know what they was talking about," he complained to himself. "I don't set up to be a fool, but I haven't brain enough to grip the meaning of such talk as that. But, by thunder, I got one point dead to rights. The Irishman called the other Dick, and that settles his goose! It is Dandy Dick, and can't be anybody else."

Meanwhile, Barney and Jean, in their shanty, were holding another conversation considerably different to the one the listener had been obliged to take in.

That night proved another that was dark—unusually dark—it being again very foggy as on the other occasion.

Once more Devil Duval and his Bower met, according to appointment, and at the same hour as before, coming to each other in the same manner, with the signals that have been mentioned.

"Well, what is the word, Right Bower?" Duval asked.

"We have got the pair dead to rights," was the response.

"Then you heard enough to satisfy you, eh?"

"You bet! Barney called the other Dick, by a slip of the tongue, and Dick shut him up quick. Oh, there's no doubt about it now, and he's our mutton."

"But, what did they talk about?"

"Don't ask me that. It was the worst fool-talk I ever listened to, an' that I'm givin' you straight. There was simply no sense at all in a single thing that was said atween 'em."

The outlaw insisted upon knowing something more about it than that vague statement, and the Bower tried to repeat something of what had been said.

Needless to say he failed, but his rendering was in no wise hurtful to what really had been said. He could not possibly jumble things any worse than the original had been jumbled and confused.

While they were talking, away off at the north end of the valley pocket once more appeared the strange light they had seen before.

"Look there!" cried Morgan.

"Ther ghost again!" exclaimed Maron. "It's furdur off this time."

"Yes; but see how fast the light is growing brighter, and how fast it comes this way!"

"Thunder, yes! And it comes right from the direction of that cursed place, too. It must be a ghost, Morgan; what else can it be? I am for moving out of here, and trying a hand somewhere else."

"What! Not weakening—you?"

"I've never been the same man since we hanged that woman, Craig Morgan."

"Bah! Don't let a little thing like that disturb your nerves. Brace up and be a devil, the same as I am. I am ripe for any crime, and ready to do it. There is not a spark of feeling in my heart. Nothing can move me."

"I know it, and I wish I was like you. I was

on the road to it, but that one thing seems to have made a coward of me, as I don't mind ownin' to you. Not that it troubled me so much till after we had seen this ghost the first time—Good heavens!"

That awful ghost—picture—whatever it was, was again hanging over the center of the camp, and again a woman's shrieks were splitting the ears of all who heard, almost.

It was too real, too vivid, to be considered a mere picture. The very scene of their crime itself, on that fatal morning, had not been more real. Both looked, Owen Maron quaking with fear, but Craig Morgan experiencing no other sensation than that of hate and exultation.

"Little does it bother me," he said, carelessly. "The wench deserved it, and I would do it again."

"I only wish I had never had a hand in it. But, let's get out of this. See, the town is getting up in hot haste this time. Everybody wants to see it. I'm off, and you the same."

Lights were appearing from every direction, men were shouting, and in a few minutes after the screaming was first heard, the entire camp was out.

It had been the resolve, on the part of nearly every individual, that, should the ghostly visitor appear again, he would be one who would see it. And each was successful, with but few exceptions among the more tardy ones.

It was the same scene repeated that found description in a previous chapter. The wild screaming, the denunciations against Devil Duval, and then the call upon the citizens of the camp to avenge the wrong that had been done.

The vision lasted only a few moments, when it faded and vanished as before, and gradually, as before, all excitement died out, and finally the camp was quiet and dark.

Next day there was nothing but the memory of the vision to prove that it had been a fact. The camp was growing, it seemed, unusually quiet and orderly. But it was only upon the surface. That under-current was growing more fierce and excited with each passing day.

On the following night—the night following this second visitation of the ghostly sky picture, and at a late hour, there was a low knock sounded upon the door occupied by Barney O'Linn and his "pard."

It had to be repeated before any response was had from within, but at length the voice of the young Irishman was heard, demanding to know who was there and what was wanted.

"There is trouble at the mine," explained a voice without, "and Mr. Randal wants Timball there at once."

"What is the trouble?" asked Timball.

"The drift is cavin' in," was the reply.

"All right; be out at once," Timball promised. "Tell him I'll come right away."

There was the response of "All right" to that, and steps were heard hastening away from the door. A few moments later Timball opened the door and stepped out. The instant he did so, half a dozen masked men surrounded him, pressing weapons against his body.

"Up with your hands, Dick Darrel!" cried one, "or you die where you stand."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TABLES TURNED. REVELATIONS.

INSTANTLY with that order there was a hasty rush of feet within the shanty, a rear door was thrown hurriedly open, and Barney O'Linn dashed out.

Timball had put up his hands as ordered, demanding to know the meaning of his arrest, and declaring that he was not Dick Darrel, but Jean Timball and none other. And in the light of the shanty his face was a picture of surprise.

It had all taken place within a space of a few seconds, after the opening of the door, and even with their stern command the masked men had passed into the shanty, forcing Timball before them at the point of their weapons. Now the door was closed behind them, but the rear was open.

A moment later and Barney would have been a prisoner, too. He had barely escaped as it was.

"Curse it! that other has got away!" the leader of the band cried.

"Shall we take after him?" asked one of the men, ready to start, and others with him.

"No; it's no use, in the dark," was the answer. "We'll take care of this one, and get away just as soon as we can. Bind him!"

So Timball's hands were securely tied behind him, and while this was being done the leader was searching hastily around the room, as if for anything he might find.

Presently an exclamation of satisfaction es-

scaped him. He had opened a drawer in the rude table, and there, together with some paper and envelopes, was one envelope that bore the name—"Richard P. Darrel." It was postmarked, and had been opened. There was no letter within, however.

"Ha!" the masked leader cried, "you will deny your identity in the face of this, will you?" He held the envelope up to view.

"That belongs to the Irishman, the cowardly cunr who has gone off and left me in this fix, when, if he had been prompt, he might have riddled the whole lot of you with that musket of his."

The leader looked at the man keenly.

"You are a darling at assuming a disguise, Dick Darrel," he declared, "but you can't fool us any longer. We have got you dead to rights in more ways than one. I will simply remind you that your Irishman has been heard to call you Dick, when off his guard for the moment."

A new expression came upon the prisoner's face, an expression that seemed half despair and half disgust.

"Curse it, I give up!" he muttered, and was silent.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the masked leader laughed, moderately. "I have got you this time, Dick Darrel, in spite of your fine playing. This night is to be your last on earth."

"Do your worst, Craig Morgan," was the defiant response. "I fear you not. A man can die but once, and it must come sooner or later."

"Gag him!" the leader ordered; and it was speedily done.

But little time was wasted. The light was put out, the door opened, and with their prisoner in hand the rascals went forth.

Not half a dozen steps had they taken, however, when the greatest surprise of their lives was sprung upon them. Two bull's-eye lights flashed upon them, and with the light came the stern order for them to surrender or die.

For one brief moment the rascals stood as though paralyzed, and that brief moment settled their fate. They were surrounded by armed men, and as soon as the light was upon them, almost, others dashed forward and seized them. They were over-matched, three to one.

The rascals fought fiercely at first, but they had been allowed no time to get at their weapons, and were speedily overcome.

No word had been spoken, except the first order, and in less than one minute it was all over.

"Dhe foinest Oi ever saw in me loife!" whispered Barney O'Linn, as he stood with his musket to the fore. "How do ye loike dhe turn av dhe tables, ye murtherin' gossoons?"

The masked prisoners glared fiercely at the men before them.

There was, first, Barney O'Linn with his big musket, but immediately in front of all stood Reuben Randal, the new superintendent of the Pay Dirt, two glittering revolvers in his grasp. And with him was Mungo Montrose, with a score of men belonging at the mine.

But, these were not all. Holding the lights were two women, the Widow Lamb and her alleged sister, the women who conducted the laundry.

For another moment the situation remained unchanged, except that one man had freed the hands of Jean Timball and removed the gag from his mouth, and he was next to speak.

"A case of Presto! my fine fellows!" he smilingly remarked.

Still the outlaws spoke not. Too amazed were they at the transition to recover their balance easily. And, little wonder.

It remained for Reuben Randal to speak next.

"Craig Morgan," he said,—and certainly the voice was not his own, "once more I have you in my power. Once more I am ready to call you to account for the wrongs you have done me and mine. And this time there will be no escape. I am Dick Darrel, your relentless Nemesis!"

With the last words he stepped forward and snatched the disguise from the leader's face.

It was the face of Sparkler, the Sport, that was revealed.

"Curse you!" the arch-knave grated, "how did you play me this trick? How is it that I could not recognize you?"

"How it was done you shall presently know. Why you could not recognize me, I do not know, unless it be that I am your equal at transformation. I will do you the justice to say that I never knew you until a few days ago."

While this was being said, Barney O'Linn had stepped forward and jerked the mask from the face of another of the dastards.

His act revealed the face of him whom we

have known as Lazy Lunk. There he was in all his bristly beard and dirt, but he was trembling violently. The day of his usefulness was past. Crime and rum had at last overcome him.

"At last Oi have ye wanst more, Heaven's curse upon ye!" cried Barney. "Oi will settle wid ye dhis toime! No more escape fur ye—no, nor fur dhe divil ye own as yer masther, aythur. Sure it is dhe ind av dhe rope ye have reached, the both of ye, murtherers and miscreants that ye are!"

"The end of the hangman's rope!" cried Mr. Montrose.

"They'll never meet that fate," declared Reuben Randal—rather Dick Darrel. "The lives of the infamous scoundrels belong to me and Barney."

"Dhat same dhey do," Barney echoed.

During this, the masks had been taken from the faces of the other four, revealing the features of fellows who were instantly recognized as some of the worst characters with which the camp had been infested.

But it was to the chief of knaves that attention was given.

He stood with face deathly pale, but with his hateful, hellish smile curving his sinister lips.

All had by this time been so securely bound that there was no chance for the escape of a single one of them. And it had all been done without a sound that was loud enough to awaken the sleepers in the nearest shanty.

"What do you think of it, you rascals?" questioned Jean Timball. "You were nicely overreached—fell into a pit of your own digging, as it were."

"I admit that we have been neatly duped," responded Craig Morgan, in his clear, defiant tone; "but the next inning will be mine. This does not end the matter, unless you hang us here and now."

"And you know I won't hang you," retorted Dick Darrel. "It must be man to man and knife to knife, between you and me. Nothing short of that will ever satisfy. That will be your next inning, as you term it, and the long delay will only add to my joy when I feel my knife pierce your heart, if heart you have."

This was spoken with such force that all involuntarily drew back, and the face of the arch fiend grew yet more pale.

"But, come," Dick added, "we must get them away before the whole camp is astir. We have a safe place for them, and one from which there will be no escape."

All started in the direction of the mine, with the light of the lanterns turned to the dimmest, and in a brief space of time the prisoners were safely lodged in a place that clearly had been prepared for them, and from which escape was impossible.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MURDER WILL COME OUT.

LEAVING reliable men on guard, Dandy Dick and the others passed out of the drift and down into the camp once more.

"I am sorry to have you defer your revenge on my account, Darrel," remarked Jean Timball, as they all stopped for a few minutes' talk before separating and seeking their beds.

"That is all right, Timball, and glad to do it," Dick made response. "You have served me well, and now it is our turn to serve you. We have your case down to a fine point, from beginning to end, and in the morning you may go ahead, now that our prisoners are secure."

"Yes; it is the clearest case I ever saw, and there can be no question when we give the facts to the public."

"Not a shadow of doubt," assented Mr. Montrose. "Curse the man! I can hardly wait."

"But, we must wait," urged Dick. "Nothing must be said to let him get wind of what is going on now. It must be a surprise, a surprise complete."

So they spent several minutes, all talking in whispers one to another, but at last they parted and went their various ways, and the camp slept on in peace, entirely unsuspecting of what had been going on.

Next morning, at quite an early hour, several men called at the shanty of the mayor and knocked at the door.

Big-foot was just getting up, and soon appeared, and great was his surprise at finding Mungo Montrose, Reuben Randal, Jean Timball, Barney O'Linn, and others before his door.

"Mornin'," he saluted, looking around in much amazement. "Great calibers! What is ther meanin' of this hyar delegation?"

"It means that we have discovered the murderer of poor Valentine Hamilton," answered Mr. Montrose.

"Great calibers ergain! Yer don't tell me so!"

"It is certainly so," assured Timball. "We want you to call all the citizens together after breakfast, when the prisoner will be produced."

"Bully! Greatest o' calibers! but this hyar does me heart good, it do, an' I'm what says so. But, who done the crime? Has ther body been found? Who is ther one who diskivered ther cuss?"

"This gentleman, Mr. Timball, is the one who sifted the case," Dandy Dick hurried to say.

Timball looked at Dick with a meaning smile. Well he knew that only for Dick Darrel he would never—or at any rate not yet—have been at the end of the case.

"Ther darn he did!" cried Big-foot, extending his hand. "Who be you, pard, anyhow?"

"He is Mr. Timball, a detective whom I sent for to sift this case," put in Mr. Montrose. "I revealed the fact to no one, wanting him to have every chance of success that was possible."

"Well, I ber dern!" was all the mayor could say.

"It is as you have heard," said Timball, "except that I did not get at the bottom of the case alone. But, you will hear all about that later on."

"And let us go at once," suggested Prince Richard. "We are drawing attention, and there will soon be a crowd around. You spread the news, Mayor Brown, and in a couple of hours we will be ready."

"Bet yer life I will!" cried the mayor; and half dressed as he was, he made a dash in the direction of the Swill-tub.

The rough element so largely in the majority, as said, it was necessary thus to "pat the mayor on the back," as it were, to gain all his sympathy on the side of right, for great was the revelation that was to come.

Big-foot spread the news rapidly, shouting and blowing around at his loudest, and in his excitement he forgot all about his breakfast. He arranged his court before the saloon, and an hour too early the whole camp was collected around him to see what was to follow.

Something before the time set, Mr. Montrose, Reuben Randal, Jean Timball and many others were seen coming from the direction of the Montrose cottage, but they had no prisoner with them, as was readily noticed.

As they approached, Muns'n Kilgore stepped out from the piazza of the Bedbug Bungalow and joined them, coming along with them and talking with Randal and Timball.

"Thunder!" cried the mayor, as they drew near, "they ain't got no prisoner, an' that's ther fact. Hope he ain't got away from 'em."

When they came up, and had passed through the opening in the crowd that had been made for them, he demanded:

"Whar's ther prisoner, boyees? I onderstood ye ter say ye had him."

"And so we have, sir," Timball made answer. Kilgore was standing between Timball and Dick, as though he were one of them.

"Waal, whar is he?" was the demand.

Timball and Dandy Dick turned both together, and a revolver in a hand of each was pressed under Kilgore's either ear.

"This is the man!" said Timball, coolly.

Had a bomb burst overhead, it could not have occasioned half the amount of surprise.

Barney O'Linn stepped forward immediately and snapped handcuffs on the rascal's wrists, and he was a prisoner safe and sure.

"Great calibers!" gasped the mayor, "it can't be so! Ther must be some mistake. Can't yer say nothin' fer yerself, Kilgore? Thunder! This hyar can't be true, neighbors."

"It is the grim fact, Mayor Brown," assured Mr. Montrose. "See the coward tremble! See his pale face! See the damp on his forehead! We have got the proof against him straight and sure. Hear Mr. Timball."

"It is a lie—a lie!" the prisoner exclaimed chokingly.

Timball stepped upon a box that stood near the large one upon which the mayor had his chair, and addressed the crowd.

"I am a professional detective," he began. "Some time ago I received a call from Mr. Montrose, wanting me to come here and try to investigate the disappearance of his superintendent. I came, in the manner you all know about, and worked in a very quiet way. At last, thanks to unexpected help, the case has been brought to a close."

"As you know, Barney O'Linn picked up my acquaintance when he came here; he rather forced himself upon me, as you don't know. I

saw there was something in that, some object or other, so I let him share my shanty, but kept an eye on him. I was not long in discovering that he had interest with the two women who run the laundry, and later, that he and Mr. Randal here were old friends. I learned all I could, and finally took Barney to task about it.

"Well, he admitted it all, and told me something that induced me to take him into my confidence. That led to their taking me into theirs, and we have worked together since that time. But, you will hear more of that when you hear from Mr. Randal. Now, you all know Silly Bob, who works at the laundry. You all know how afraid he has been of Kilgore. It was not without good reason that he feared the man, for Silly Bob saw Munson Kilgore murder Valentine Hamilton!"

"A lie—a lie!" the prisoner screamed. "I never did it!"

"It is the truth, as I am going to prove!" was the calm response.

"An' if yer did do it," spoke the mayor, grimly, "it means a rope fer yer neck, sure as calibers."

"By kindly treatment," the detective went on, "the women got the secret out of Silly Bob, gave it to Randal, and he passed it on to me. Together we investigated it, and the result is that the proof is positive. Kilgore loved Miss Montrose, and the superintendent was in his way. He could not hope to win her hand without removing him. It was a desperate thing, but he was equal to it. He forged a letter, making it appear to be from Miss Montrose, and sent it by messenger to Hamilton. Silly Bob was the messenger, and he heard Hamilton read the note half-aloud. It requested him to meet the supposed writer at the plateau near the camp at an early hour.

"Silly Bob took it into his head that it would be a good idea to go there a little earlier, hide himself, and so witness the lovers' meeting. He went, hid upon a shelf of rock a little above the plateau, and witnessed, not a love scene, but a cowardly murder! First to appear was Kilgore. He stepped back close against the wall and waited. Ere long came Hamilton. He stepped boldly out upon the plateau, and when he was near the edge, then Kilgore covered his heart with a revolver. There was a short talk between them, which Bob cannot repeat in full, but which showed that Kilgore had decoyed his rival there for the purpose of murdering him; and then Kilgore fired, and Valentine Hamilton toppled over and down into the gorge below."

Immediately there was a mad howl for the murderer's life, and the mayor and others had all they could do to check the crowd and stay them in their intention of doing violence before the prisoner had had a chance to speak in his own behalf.

CHAPTER XIX.

BORDERLAND JUSTICE.

"HOLD ON, boyees! Hold on! Hold on!"

So the mayor shouted, springing up in his place, his weapons in hand.

"Yes, hold on," echoed Timball. "You want to give the man a fair hearing, and let the proof satisfy you."

"That's to ther p'int," cried Big-foot Brown. "We have knowed Kilgore long an' well, feller galoots, an' he must have a fair show fer his money. Ther proof must be anted up."

"That is it," added Dick Darrel. "You don't want to hang a man on the say-so of a silly youth. Satisfy yourselves about it, first, and then do your hanging afterward, if that is what you mean to do if he is guilty—and he deserves it! But, make sure you are right."

There were many shouts from the crowd, to the effect that no more proof was wanted than the man's face itself, but the tide was turned, and the mob became quiet once more.

"Such is the story," resumed Timball. "Now, mayor, it remains for you to appoint a committee, heading it yourself, and make an exploration of that gorge under the plateau. Pick your men and go at once, and we will stay here with the prisoner till you get back. It will not take you over an hour. And whatever you find there, bring it with you."

"That's to ther tune, by calibers!" Big-foot cried. "I'll do it too ter oncet, an' be back in less time 'n you set. Whar's Sparkler, ther Sport? I want him fer one o' my pards. He's a man ter tie to, an' ther only one what ever sot me on my head. I want Sparkler. Whar is he?"

He was looking around over the crowd to find him.

"He hasn't been seen this morning," remarked Timball. "Pick somebody else, and save time."

"Waal, reckon I'll have ter. Funny he ain't 'round, an' sich a time as this goin' on." And immediately he proceeded and picked out eight or ten men to go with him to investigate.

They set out with eager haste, and the crowd settled down to await their return with what patience they could.

"You may as well confess," remarked Timball to the prisoner.

"Confess to a lie!" was the sneer. "Never! I did not kill Hamilton, and I defy you to prove it against me."

Perhaps he had the secret hope that nothing would be found under the plateau, although he ought to have known the detective had investigated, and knew just what was there.

In something less than an hour there was a shout, and the committee was seen returning. And among them they carried something—a dread something that, at sight, told its own story.

The prisoner, pale as death itself, shook like a leaf, and finally broke down. With a groan he sunk upon the ground, whining for mercy.

It was with an effort again that the crowd was held in check until the proof had been established, although it was hardly needed.

The mayor and his party came up, bearing on a rude stretcher the decaying body of a man, and that man—the missing superintendent.

"Hyar be all what's left of poor Hamilton," Big-foot spoke. "Ther proof ar' all that kin be asked, an' more. Kilgore is ther man that done it."

"We knows it!" shouted the crowd. "Fetch ther cuss erlong till we hangs him! He's got ter swing fur it, you kin bet!"

"Hold on, boys, hold on," cried Timball. "Let's hear what more your mayor has to say."

"I say ther proof is solid an' sure," Big-foot shouted. "Hyar! See what pore Hamilton writ, after his fall down thar in ther death hole. Mr. Timball, you read it out to ther crowd."

As he spoke he took from under his coat the torn bosom of a shirt, on which was seen some pencil writing.

"Where did you find this?" Timball asked.

"It was in ther dead man's hand," was the answer. "An' this hyar pencil was with it. It are pore Hamilton's own shirt front, torn off by himself ter write on."

The prisoner utterly collapsed, gave some startling interest to this new bit of evidence. The hand of fate was certainly against him.

The writing on the bosom was large and sprawling, but not a word of it was to be mistaken. And the detective read it aloud, as follows:

"By the hand of Munson Kilgore! He lured me to the plateau, and there shot me, and I fell over. I am dying. Avenge me, whoever finds my body. What I write is true, as God bears me witness."
"VALENTINE HAMILTON."

The last line and the signature were in very staggering letters, showing that the poor fellow's strength was fast going. How long he had lain there, suffering, it was impossible to tell.

"What has yer got ter say to that thar, ye cussed hypocrite?" demanded the mayor, turning upon the prisoner.

"I have nothing to say, only to confess," was the answer. "It is all against me, and there's no use my denying it. I killed him, for the reason this accursed detective has given."

With no hope for his life, he stood in a sort of dogged despair, awaiting the fate that was sure to follow.

"And, curse you!" cried Mr. Montrose, "you had the brass to pay attentions to my daughter!"

"Yes, curse her!" was the sharp retort. "Better for Hamilton to be where he is, than to have married her, too. She is as fickle as the wind. Only for her, I would not be where I am."

Montrose pressed forward, as though he would kill the wretch where he stood, but the crowd forced him back.

"We'll attend to him," said the mayor. "We'll give him a send-off, you kin bet."

"An' mebbey he is ther outlaw, Devil Duval," somebody suggested.

"No; we know better'n that," declared the mayor. "He hev been hyar too long, if yer will stop ter think."

"No, he is not the outlaw," assured Dick Darrel. "I will have a revelation for you, presently, concerning that gentleman. But let us have this case done with first."

The mayor—"Judge Lynch"—had resumed his place on his box, and now stood up, saying:

"Munson Kilgore, this hyar court finds you guilty of murder, an' that of ther wu'st sort. You has been tried, an' now ther sentence is that you be hanged up by ther neck till yer croaks. Boyees, sarve him!"

Immediately followed a wild shout, a mad rush; the prisoner was seized in rough hands and hustled away. It would have been useless to protest, had any one been inclined to do so. The rough class was so greatly in power that their will was law.

"Sarves him right," cried the mayor, as he looked on. "They can't do no wuss to him 'an he deserves, so let 'em go it. String him right up, fellers, an' let him dance his last jig on wind. It's a pity we couldn't make two jobs of it, an' give him a double dose, that's all. Yank him, an' then plug him wi' lead till he are ballasted fur ther hot clime!"

The mad crowd needed no urging. To the nearest tree the doomed wretch was dragged, being kicked and cuffed all the way there, and in less than a minute he was dangling in mid-air. And then immediately a fusilade of pistol-shots was fired at his swaying body.

You shudder at the picture. It is not overdrawn in any particular. Such is the prompt and effective way, rough as it is, of dealing with crime on the far borders of civilization, where the written law is a dead letter.

In about three minutes it was all over, and all that remained of the murderer was his riddled body swaying at the end of the rope. And the crowd returned to where the body of his victim lay.

This the mayor ordered buried with all the pomp the camp could possibly show, and the funeral was undertaken at once.

Nothing had been seen of the mine manager's daughter, but nothing was thought of that. The situation was understood, and no one went to tell her of the discovery, for undoubtedly she knew what was going on.

By this time the forenoon was more than half-spent. Not a person had thought of work, and the mine and everything else was idle. The excitement was too high for such things as that to be given attention for a moment. No sooner had the burial taken place than the crowd surged around Reuben Randal—Dick Darrel, eager to hear what it was that he had to tell them regarding Devil Duval.

CHAPTER XX.

DANDY DICK'S STORY.

THIS was sooner than Dandy Dick had counted upon. He had wanted to bring things about in his own time and way. But the denizens of Rough-and-Tumble would hear to nothing that was to bring delay with it.

So Dick's plans, whatever they had been, had to be changed, and the mob had to be appeased. And the mayor was the worst man he had to contend against. Nothing would do but Dick must tell his story then and there, and the mayor and his horde had to be satisfied.

Dick finally agreed, therefore, and, saying a few words to Barney, mounted to the mayor's seat of justice, so that all might see and hear.

"My friends," he spoke, "I see you are determined, so I will change my plans to gratify you. Kindly make way for my man, Barney O'Linn, to pass out and bring my other allies here before you. You will soon have an interest in them as well as in my story. Now, to begin with, let me tell you that my true name is not Reuben Randal, but Richard Prince Darrel; better known as Dandy Dick Darrel."

The shout that greeted this was deafening. Nor did it end with that. There were cheers and comments from every side.

By the time this abated, Barney O'Linn was back again, bringing with him the two women from the laundry. And then, at a suggestion from some one, there was further delay while the platform was enlarged so that all of them might occupy it.

"Yes, I am Dick Darrel," Dandy Dick resumed, and in order that the crowd might have a full understanding of his feud with Craig Morgan, he went ahead and told the story of the past as it has been disclosed in previous stories. He was listened to attentively, and when finally he paused, there was a wild shout for the life of his hell-born foe.

"No, no; he is not yours, but mine!" Dick opposed. "He must fight me, man to man. Hanging is too good for him."

"But who be he?" cried Big-foot Brown, putting the question that was on the lips of every one. "Tell us who ther p'izen cuss be. By calibers, we'll burn him at ther stake!"

"Have patience, and hear my story to the end," said Dick. "I have now given you the

past, and have brought my story down to the beginning of the present. I will proceed from that point. Having been decoyed myself, and almost to my death, the thought naturally came to me to play the same card back again upon my hated foe. And with that end in view I set to work, with the help of my faithful allies.

"My decoy, then, was Barney O'Linn. And I can not say enough in praise of the manner in which—"

"Whist, now, draw it mild," Barney interrupted.

"—In which he played his part," Dick finished. "And the same of these women, who have been more than faithful to my cause. Well knowing that Barney, without disguise, would be recognized and followed by my enemy, did he want to get at me secretly, I proposed that he should put himself in his way, when I and the others would follow on in disguise and entrap him if we could. And that was not all: Barney was to come here and make friends with some one whom the outlaw would be likely to mistake for me, and whom he might try to entrap and kill.

"It took time to prepare, but finally the scheme was ready for the working, and we turned our steps in this direction. Barney was in advance, and this camp was chosen as the scene of what was—is—to be the scene of the last act in the almost drama, so unreal the whole seems—may seem, to those who look on. To us who are the actors it is only too real. But, I am ahead of my story. I must go back to an event that had taken place some time previous to this. It was when we were dogging our enemy, to learn something of his plans, and before our own scheme had been arranged. Let me turn aside for a moment to tell you about that, since it is one of the important factors in my story.

"One forenoon we were pushing our way along over a rough mountain trail, myself, Mrs. Warne and Barney, when we came upon a thrilling sight. Ahead of us, on a tree at the edge of a plateau, hung the form of a woman. At first we could not make out much about her, but running forward, we found that she was alive, and that, even with a rope around her neck, she was supporting herself by her arms thrown over the limb! In a few seconds we had cut her down, but she was unconscious and we had no hope that she could live. We recognized her as the woman of whom I have told you—the one who wasso faithful to that outlaw devil. We did all in our power for her, and at last were rewarded by having her recover and tell her story.

"She, as she admitted, was the one who had killed the outlaw's woman ally in the cavern. It was done in one of her fits of almost insanity—jealous insanity. It was a secret she meant to carry with her to the grave. After again rescuing the demon from my power, she had no thought but that he would be faithful to her, and at first it seemed as though he would be. He could be faithful where it best served his ends. But, some time later, when they were moving in haste in this direction, she one night talked in her sleep and told everything about the crime she had done. This so enraged Duval that he hanged her as soon as it was light, with the help of his fellow devil, his Right Bower, Owen Maron.

"It would have been the end of the woman, but for one thing. They had not taken time or pains to bind her hands securely enough, and in her struggles, immediately after being hanged, her hands came suddenly free. She had been drawn almost to the limb over which the rope was supported, and reaching up, she caught hold of it and drew herself up. It was done before the men had passed beyond hearing, and had they remained a moment longer they would have discovered it and undoubtedly would have ended her life with bullets. As it was, she was enabled to loosen the rope around her neck, and to keep hold with her arms, and there we found her. This woman, gentlemen, is she!"

He indicated the one of the two who had been known among them as Katy Dansen, the sister to the "Widow Lamb." The latter, needless to say, was Mary Warne, as the crowd had already been informed.

"Our scheme was, finally," Dick resumed, "that the two women should come here and open a laundry, that being thought about as unlikely an occupation as our common foe would expect them to engage in. They were to investigate a little, and upon their report Barney and myself were to act. We heard from them, and Barney came on, in no disguise, and after him followed our enemies, as we supposed they would; but at this time we had lost sight of them. Barney was to make a friend of Mr.

Timball, and so decoy our enemy into the belief that he was I. We did not know then that Mr. Timball was a detective like ourselves. That came to be known in the manner he has already explained to you.

"Then, later, I came to apply for the situation of superintendent at the Pay Dirt Mine. I was to keep entirely in the background, but with a careful eye upon our decoy, so that he could not be harmed. When we had taken him into our confidence, and he came to know the role that had been forced upon him, then it was with slightly less risk to himself. I owe Mr. Timball much thanks for the help he has given me. We waited and watched, to get at the identity of our foes, but it was slow, hard work, for Craig Morgan was a match for our best efforts, and had been from the first. I had come to know that in order to overmatch him I must exert myself to the utmost. He is keen, subtle, fearless, a giant in strength and will, and a devil at heart. In the matter of disguises, few detectives can beat him. It was only a few days ago that we finally came to know positively that he was Sparkler the Sport!"

"Sparkler, ther Sport!"

The crowd went crazy in its excitement. Nothing like it had ever been known at Rough-and-Tumble. There was a wild, urgent demand for the man to be produced, for it had been understood that the outlaw was a prisoner.

"He is mine," Dick Darrel insisted. "You shall not see him alive, unless you pledge me your word, every man of you, that you will leave him for me to deal with. I tell you he shall not hang; I must fight him to the death. You have heard my story; can you wonder at my determination in this?"

"No! No! Yer shell hev him; an' if yer gits downed, thar is plenty more ter take up yer fight."

"And there must be no interference," Dick insisted. "It must be a fair fight, for I would scorn to take any advantage of him in that. Curse him! my hate of him, and the wrongs I have to avenge, will carry me through."

"Yes! Yes! A fair fight! You shell hev it! He is your meat, an' you is ther cook!"

A hundred such cries, enough to show Dick that the crowd would grant what he demanded.

"Yes," he resumed then, "Sparkler the Sport and Devil Duval are one and the same; and his Right Bower, as he is called, Owen Maron, you have seen here in the person of the fellow you have known as Lazy Lunk."

Another outbreak of excitement.

"Yis, begob!" cried Barney O'Linn, "an' dhe same is my muttin. Ye know dhe wrong he has done me; sure nothin' but his blood by me own hand will ever blot out dhe score."

He, too, was assured that he should have the revenge he desired.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOMETHING IMPOSSIBLE.

THERE was more to be told, and as soon as comparative quiet was had, Prince Richard resumed.

"The Right Bower was the first we detected," he continued. "Watching him, we ere long made sure of our man in Sparkler, the Sport. After that it was comparatively plain sailing.

"We knew that Barney and Timball were under close watch, then, and that all they wanted was the proof that Timball was myself. It was our aim to give them that proof. They, Timball and Barney, walked out by yon shanty of evenings, and there held conversations that it would puzzle a professor in languages to have made anything out of. It was simply meaningless. But in it, somewhere, Barney would address Mr. Timball as 'Dick,' and then would follow words calculated to confirm the listeners in the suspicions they had.

"And you will want to know something about the ghostly sky-pictures that have been seen—"

"Yes! Yes! How was them 'ar done?"

"Simply stereoptican work. The dense fog overhead serving the purpose of the necessary reflector. Mary Warne here painted the scene, and Mr. Timball's ingenuity did the rest. In fact, it was he who proposed it. It was cleverly done, and helped us in more ways than one. It is needless for me to tell you that when Sparkler appeared upon the scene, buttoning his coat and vest as though he had just got up, it was all a sham. He had not yet been in bed on either occasion. All that I have said of his skill and craftiness does not do him justice. He is a foe-man worthy of my steel, and one whom it would be no discredit to me to fear. It must be his life or mine, before our game is ended; but, the end is near. He has escaped me for the last time.

"But, I must push on with the little more that remains to be told. Need I tell you that, with a score of men, and these two faithful women, we spent several long and weary nights out of doors, within a stone's throw of the shanty occupied by Timball and Barney? We knew that did my decoy work as we desired, the life of Timball would be attempted. Knew that he would be lured from his shanty, taken off into the hills, and there quietly murdered. We must be prepared for that move, and be on hand to checkmate it when it came to be made. Last night—rather this morning, it was attempted. The rascals came to the shanty, knocked, told Timball that he was wanted at the mine, and then the man who had knocked pretended to go away. The moment Timball opened the door he was made a prisoner.

"Barney sprung out immediately to alarm us, but we were already on hand, and at the cabin. No harm could have come to Timball, unless they shot him down at once, and it was not at all likely they would do that. They pressed him into the shanty, were there some minutes, and when they reappeared we were ready to capture them, and capture them we did. It was about as clever a piece of work as we ever had a hand in. And now they are prisoners in the mine, six of them, and their escape is impossible. I shall not again be cheated out of my revenge, for there is no friend to aid the arch devil this time. This woman who would have willingly laid down her life for him, has at last come to see him as the monster that he is, and he has no more bitter foe in me, scarcely."

"That is true," Pearl Mayne declared, fiercely. "Should Dick Darrel fail in taking his life, then by my hand he dies."

"Or by mine!" added Mary Warne.

And certainly they had cause enough against him, as the reader of the previous stories must admit.

There was little more to be told, and Dick hastened to the end. The points were brought out in full, and everything made clear; and intense—more than intense—was the interest.

"An' now for ther endin'," cried Big-foot Brown, almost beside himself. "I never seen sich a rousin' time as this hyar, by calibers! An' ther rousin'est part of it is yet ter foller. Great calibers! Trot that pizen snake out hyar, Dandy Dick, an' jest most everlastin'ly bore him with yer bowie! Ain't that ther talk, feller sinners an' galoots in general? Yer shell hev it out with ther cuss, an' hyar's what sez so! I'm Mayor of Rough-an'-Tumble, au' my word is law."

One prolonged yell of approval greeted this.

Dick motioned the crowd to silence as speedily as he could.

"Once more I want your pledged word, men of Rough-an'-Tumble," he said.

"An' yer has it! Yas! Yas! Yer kin have ther cuss all to yerself, an' do with him as yer wants to!"

"You promiae me, then, that not one of you will interfere. That you will let it be a fair fight to the end even though it be against me."

Not a man in all the crowd but pledged himself to that condition.

"Very well, then," spoke Dick. "We will bring the fellows out here, and you may do with four of them as you will. The other two, Craig Morgan and Owen Maron, we intend to fight to the death."

"That's it! Trot 'em out! Let ther sarcus begin! Whoop! You is ther man on wheels! You is good fer him!"

Hundreds of such exclamations, and it was quite a time before the mayor could make himself heard to say a few words. He ordered the crowd to remain there while Dick and his party went for the prisoners, and it was with weapons in hand that he gave the order.

Dick, Barney, Timball, and their picked men, set out for the mine, for the purpose of bringing the prisoners forth.

"Well, Barney," Dick remarked, "this is to be the ending of a long, hard and trying fight."

"Yis, begob," responded Barney. "An' may God an' dhe roight be wid us."

"Amen! to that. Yes, this is the ending scene, for there has been no possible escape this time, nor will there be. We have guarded too well. Ah! how I will delight in working out the fury of my hate upon the wretch."

"An' dhe divil help him when wanst ye do begin," said Barney.

They pushed forward with haste, and in a short time the score or more of men, all armed, entered the drift and pushed on in the direction of the place where the prisoners were.

They came to the guardsmen first, half a dozen

strong fellows, who held the entrance to the traverse tunnel that led to the corner where the rascals were bound; and they had but one report to make—that everything was all right and the prisoners safe.

How could it well be otherwise?

They went on, now with torches to light their way, and a little distance more brought them to the end.

And there on the floor lay the prisoners, as they had been left, bound and helpless. But of a sudden, and with a cry, Dick Darrel, who is in advance, springs forward.

Then, with a groan, he lets fall his torch and sinks back against the wall of the tunnel, overcome. One of the prisoners is a woman—a woman bound and gagged; and Craig Morgan, his hated foe, is gone! The others, close behind, spring forward to his side.

"Phwat is it?" cries Barney.

"Cheated again," answers Dick. "Oh! merciful heavens! am I never to have the revenge that is justly mine?"

A sob escapes his breast, and tears dim his eyes. And who can wonder? It was enough to break the heart of the strongest man. It was a bitter—more than bitter disappointment.

The others stood silent, struck dumb with awe—if it was that. But Dandy Dick soon roused up. Grabbing his torch, he turned to look at the face of the woman. A cry escaped him. Turning her toward him, he saw—the face of Gulnare Montrose! It was she who had baffled him!

"Curses on you!" he cried. "Why did you do this thing?"

He freed her so that she could speak.

"Because I was a poor, blind fool," she responded, weakly. "I loved the man—No, was fascinated by him, and I could not believe him guilty. As soon as I knew he was here, I came to him, through the secret tunnel from the house. I removed the gag from his lips, that he might talk. He told me it was all a terrible mistake, and that I alone could save him. That if I did not free him, his blood would be upon my head. He swore his love for me. But, bah! I shudder now at the thought. I cut his bonds, when, quick as a tiger, he turned upon me, gagged and bound me, and in a moment more was gone. Fool—fool that I was!"

"Yes, fool indeed!" cried Dick. "But how was it he did not free the rest of them?"

"He laughed at them all, telling them they had served his ends as far as they ever could, and said he would leave them to their fate."

Was there any limit to the diabolical depravity of this human devil?

CHAPTER XXII.

BARNEY'S SCORE SETTLED.

THE guardsman had followed in and stood speechless. They had not heard a single suspicious sound. But the explanation given by the girl was enough to reveal everything.

"Well, the impossible has happened," Dick Darrel sighed after a moment of silence. "But," rousing up quickly, "is it too late? May we not yet capture the fiend before he gets away? How long since he left you here, woman?"

With the last question he turned abruptly upon Gulnare.

"It is more than an hour—yes, it is nearly two hours since," was the reply. "Come! we may find him in the tunnel!"

"You say the tunnel ends at your house?"

"Yes; in the cellar."

"Was the way open for him to get out, think you?"

"It may have been—may not. Don't let us lose a second. Come, and I will guide you."

"Just a moment," Dick checked. "Men, two or three of you remain here and see to it that none of these rascals escape. Let the rest divide in about equal numbers, half to follow me and the other half to go out and around to the Montrose cottage in all haste. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," was the response, and the directions were carried out, the men quickly electing for themselves which they would do.

"Master Dick," spoke Barney, "ye will have me stay here and kape me eye on dhis spalpeen, will ye not?"

"Yes, by all means stay," cried Dick. "And see to it that he does not escape."

"Trust me fur dhat same, sor."

"Now, one question, and we are ready," added Dick, hurriedly. "How far is it to the end of the tunnel, young woman?"

"I don't know—I can't tell you," was the answer. "You know where the house is and can dge."

"We ought to let the men outside get to the house first, so if we run the rat out of his hole they can be ready for him."

"They will be there as soon as we, so come on—don't stop another moment. I am eager to see the wretch taken. I could see him hanged and never shudder. Come, for I am going."

Snatching a torch from the hand of one who stood near her, she started down into the dismal darkness, and Dick and the others followed.

It was a last hope—a least hope. There was just the bare possibility that the man had not yet made his escape at the other end of the tunnel, and if not—well, it would mean death for him.

The girl guide was well acquainted with the way, evidently, and pushed forward at a rapid pace, flashing her light at every turn, eager to find the man whose bitter enemy she now was.

Presently at an abrupt bend, a groan escaped her lips.

"The door!" she gasped.

"What door? What about a door?" asked Dick.

Even while speaking he had advanced far enough to see for himself.

Just ahead a heavy door barred the tunnel, and from the girl's manner it was plain that she believed it fastened.

Springing forward, Dick hurled himself against it, only to find that it was almost as solid as the rock itself.

"We must break it!" he cried. "Come, men, all together, and we shall carry it off its hinges!"

He stepped back a pace, and then with two others dashed forward again.

The shock made the door tremble and creak, and without any delay the blow was repeated, and again and again.

Finally the door splintered in the center, and then of a sudden it gave way and Dick and the others pushed through, torches and weapons in hand.

From that point the tunnel was no longer a part of the mine, and was straight and narrow, and as far ahead as could be seen there was nothing that had the appearance of a human form.

"Come, now we can run," cried the girl guide, and once more taking the lead she bounded along through the passage with the speed of a deer.

In a brief time the tunnel ended in a cellar, and there the girl stopped and flashed her torch around.

The outlaw was not there. That he had made good his escape was clearly evident.

The girl led the way up the steps that ran from the cellar to the kitchen of the cottage, Dick following right after her, and as she threw open the door an unexpected sight met their gaze.

On the floor, and bound, lay the woman servant of the family, having been deprived of her dress.

It was but the work of a minute to release her, when she bounded to her feet, looking odd enough in her short skirts.

"Dhe murderin' villain!" she screamed.

"Which way did he go?" demanded Dick.

She pointed to the door, and it was enough. To search for him further would be folly.

It was clear that he had made his escape.

The woman quickly explained how it had happened. She was at work in the kitchen, when suddenly the door leading to the cellar was opened and a man sprung upon her. He threatened her life if she made a noise of any kind.

Seizing her, with a strength she could not resist, he gagged her, and before she was aware of what he intended, had stripped off her dress, quickly binding her hands and feet immediately after. And then, with all haste, he put the dress on himself, and throwing a shawl over his head, went out.

It was more at length in the telling, but the facts were simple, and with a sigh Dick descended again to the tunnel and retraced his steps to the point where he had left Barney and the prisoners.

The others followed, together with the men who had gone around, one of the men having opened the door to them at the house.

"Did the villain escape?" asked Barney, as soon as Dick appeared.

"Yes, he has made good his escape, Barney," was the answer. "We have our work to do over again. I shall begin another search at once. Never will I give up. Nothing but death can stop me."

"An' it is sorry enough Oi am dhat he got away," Barney signed. "But, t'ank Hivvin, Oi am not to be ch'ated out av me own revenge dhis toime. And Oi will not put it off a single minute, aythur, but Oi'll have it here and now. Give dhis villain a knife, some wan, and let him come at me. By the powers it is his life or

mine, an' dhat here and now. Come on, ye spalpeen!"

And while talking he had cut the cords that bound his foe.

"You had better let the men hang him, and not risk your life," urged Dick.

"Never a toime!" Barney cried. "Would you do dhat same? Begorra, but Oi am av dhe moind ye wouldn't."

And Dick knew only too well that he would not.

He saw that Barney was right in what he demanded, and putting himself in his place under like circumstances, handed a knife to the young Irishman's foe.

Owen Maron grasped the knife with a feeling of despair, evidently, and for a moment stood on the defensive, but the next instant he dropped the weapon and faced his enemy without it.

"No," he muttered, "kill me. I deserve it."

"Dhat same Oi will, an ye don't defend yer-self," Barney sternly declared, advancing with his knife raised and ready.

Perhaps it was the glittering blade that made the villain change his mind. Anyhow, change it he did, and stooping he picked up the knife he had dropped and the two men sprung at each other.

Dandy Dick moved near, and stood ready to render instant assistance, in case Barney should get the worst of it, or there appeared danger that he would. Never would Dick allow him to be killed if he could prevent. Still, he knew the satisfaction it would be to Barney to slay his foe with his own hand.

For a few moments the struggle was hard and furious.

Back and forth they bent, turning this way and that in their desperate effort for the mastery, and each with the determination that the other should die by his hand. It was a fearful thing to witness.

Suddenly the knife-hand of one man flew free—it was that of the outlaw!

Dandy Dick sprung to intercept the blow that he knew must follow, but his aid was not needed. With a sudden turn Barney had thrown himself for the moment out of reach of the blade.

At that same moment, too, his own hand was torn from the other's grasp, and now the decisive moment was at hand. Both knives were free, and flashing in the light, and it only remained for the favorable opportunity for one of them—perhaps both—to dip deep in blood.

There was a pause of a second, and then—then the end. The struggle was short, sharp and fierce. Suddenly there came a half-scream and groan, and one of the men fell, pierced to the heart.

It was Barney O'Linn who rose unharmed.

"Me revenge is had," he panted. "Now, Dick Darrel, Oi am devoted to you to dhe end for your own."

"One less, Barney, and I congratulate you," giving his hand.

"Yis, and may your turn soon come."

"It will come some day, never fear. Craig Morgan shall die by my hand, if life is spared me to hunt down the monster!"

The body was taken up and carried out, the prisoners being taken along at the same time.

No time was lost, then, in getting back to the place where the eager crowd was impatiently awaiting their coming.

Needless to say the disappointment was great when it was made known that the chief of the rascals was missing. The crowd went wild.

It required all the best efforts of Dandy Dick and the others to prevent harm being done to the girl who had freed him. She had wisely put herself out of sight.

The other outlaws were promptly disposed of, and, with Owen Maron, were all buried in one common grave. It had been a bitter disappointment for the two women, but they pledged themselves to Dandy Dick anew for another struggle.

For two days the excitement in the camp continued, and it was without a parallel in the camp's history. Finally it quieted, and Dick Darrel, Barney, Mary Warne and Pearl Mayne took their leave, after a "rousing time" had been made in their honor. The rough camp was none the worse for their having been there, and they left behind them some warm friends. Jean Timball, too, went away at the same time, his business there having been accomplished. In parting with Dick he expressed undying friendship and regard, and asked to be called at any time when his service could be of use.

THE END.

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